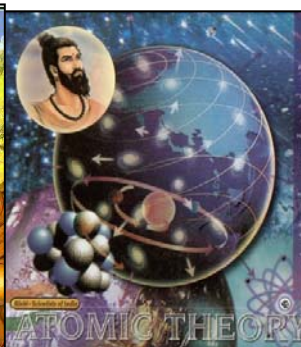
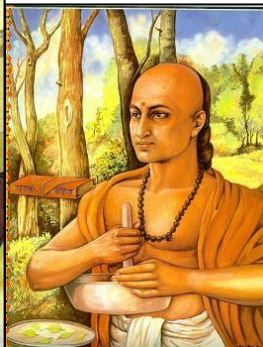
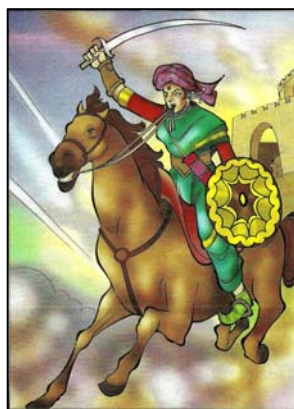




Hindu Dharma for Students – Part 6



Sadāchāra: Inspirations from the Lives of Great Hindus

By Vishal Agarwal

This page has been left blank intentionally.

No.	Name	Period she/he lived in	Region of Birth/ Association	Page No.
	Note to Parents and Teachers			1
1.0	Ancient Rishis			2
1.1	Rishi Bharadvāja, the Perpetual Student	Before 2500 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	3
1.2	Rishi Agastya, the Hindu Missionary	Before 2500 BCE	Punjab and Peninsular India	3
1.3	Rishi Bhrigu	Before 2500 BCE	Gujarat (India)	5
1.4	Vashishtha, the Forgiving Rishi	Before 2000 BCE	Punjab/Himachal Pradesh (India)	6
1.5	Vishvamisra, the King become Rishi	Before 2000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh/Bihar (India)	9
1.6	Rishi Nārada, The Rishi who loved to Gossip	Before 2000 BCE	Northern/Western India	10
1.7	Rishi Dadhichi & Rishi Pippalāda	Before 2000 BCE	Northern India	14
1.8	Vālmiki, the Robber who became a Rishi	Before 1500 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	16
1.9	Shabarī, the Disciple of Rishi Matanga	Before 1500 BCE	Karnataka (India)	17
1.10	Ashtāvakra, the Physically Deformed Rishi	Before 1500 BCE	Uttar Pradesh & Bihar (India)	19
1.11	Markandeya, the Boy who became an Immortal Rishi	Before 1500 BCE	Haryana / Himachal Pradesh (India)	20
1.12	Rishi Veda Vyāsa, the Son of a Fisherwoman	Before 1000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh/ Haryana (India)	20
1.13	Rishi Yajnavalkya and Rishikās Gārgī & Maitreyī	Before 1000 BCE	Northern India /Bihar (India)	22
1.14	Rishi Āruṇī, the Ideal Student	Before 2000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	26
1.15	Rishi Saubhari, who lost his Rishihood			26
1.16	Rishi Mudgala, the giver of Charity	Before 1500 BCE	Haryana (India)	27
1.17	Rishi Satyakāma Jabāla, the Illegitimate Boy	Before 1500 BCE		27
1.18	Rishi Shukadeva, Free of Attachments	Before 1500 BCE	Uttar Pradesh/Haryana	28
1.19	Rishi Kavasha Ailusha, Son of a Maid	Before 2000 BCE	Rajasthan (India)/Bahawalpur (Pakistan)	29
1.20	Nachiketa – the Child Rishi	?	?	30
1.21	Rishi Jaigishavya, the great Yogī	Before 2000 BCE	Rajasthan (India)/Bahawalpur (Pakistan)	34
1.22	Rishi Uttanka	~1500 BCE	Rajasthan (India)	34
1.23	Rishi Angirasa	Before 2000 BCE	Bihar (India)	35
2.0	Emperors of the Solar Dynasty			37
2.1	Sagar, Amshumān, Dilīpa and Bhagīratha	Before 2000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	37
2.2	Harishchandra, the Truthful King	Before 2000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	38
2.3	Ambarīsha, the great Devotee	Before 1500 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	40
3.0	Emperors of the Lunar Dynasty			42
3.1	Yayāti and Puru	Before 2500 BCE	Haryana/Punjab (India)	42
3.2	Bharat – the King who gave his name to India	Before 2000 BCE	Haryana/Punjab (India)	43
3.3	Shibi, the Protector of the Weak	Before 1500 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	47
3.4	Kuru, the King who sacrificed himself	Before 1000 BCE	Haryana (India)	48
3.5	Pareekshit – From Death to Immortality	Before 1000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	49
4.0	Doctors, Botanists, Environmentalists and Veterinarians			52
4.1	Charaka, the Ancient Doctor	800 BCE	Kashmir (India)	52

4.2	Sushruta, the Ancient Surgeon	1000 BCE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	53
4.3	Jeevaka, the Physician of Buddha	550 BCE	Bihar (India)	54
4.4	Vāgbhatta	400 CE	Kashmir (India)	54
4.5	Veterinarians of horses and elephants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shālihotra, the Horse Physician Pālākāpya, the Elephant Physician 	? ?	Uttar Pradesh (India) Assam (India)	55
4.6	Botanists and Plant doctors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nobel Laureate J C Bose 	1858 – 1937 CE	Bangladesh	55 56
4.7	Guru Jambheshwar – an Environmentalist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chipko Movement 	1451 – 1536 CE	Rajasthan (India) Uttarakhand (India)	56 58
5.0	Philosophers, Scientists, Mathematicians and Engineers			59
5.1	Rishi Kapila and Rishi Kaṇāda	Before 1500 BCE	Gujarat (?), Uttar Pradesh	59
5.2	Astronomers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Āryabhatta Varāhamihira Raja Sawāi Mānsingh Kalpāna Chawla & Sunita Williams 	5 th - 6 th cent. CE 6 th – 7 th cent. CE 1688 – 1743 CE 20 th -21 st cent. CE	? Madhya Pradesh (India) Rajasthan (India) Haryana (India) & USA	60 60 60 61 61
5.3	Mathematicians: Bhāskara <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Srinivas Ramanujan 	1114 – 1185 CE 1887 – 1920 CE	Karnataka (India) Tamil Nadu (India)	62 62
5.4	Architects: Vishvakarma, Maya	Before 2000/1500 BCE	?	63
6.0	Scholars of Languages, Arts and Law			65
6.1	Panini, the Dullard who became a Scholar	6 th cent. BCE	NWFP (Pakistan)	65
6.2	Kaiyyata – Learning over Royal Recognition	11 th cent. CE	Kashmir (India)	66
6.3	Varadarāja – Excellence through Hard Work	17 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	66
6.4	Thiruvalluvar, the Wise Weaver Saint	200 BCE	Tamil Nadu (India)	67
6.5	The sixty-four Hindu arts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bharat Muni 	Before 500 BCE	Kashmir or Tamil Nadu	67 68
6.6	Kālidāsa, the greatest Hindu Playwright	5 th cent. CE	Madhya Pradesh (India)	68
6.7	Māgha and his Wife, rich in Letters and Giving	7 th cent. CE	Rajasthan (India)	70
6.8	Rām Shāstrī Prabhūṇe, the Honest Judge	18 th cent. CE	Maharashtra (India)	70
7.0	Emperors of Ancient Indian Subcontinent			72
7.1	Chandragupta Maurya and Guru Chāṇakya	4 th -3 rd cent. BCE	Bihar (India)	72
7.2	Ashoka, the King of Dharma	3 rd cent. BCE	Bihar (India)	73
7.3	Bhartrihari and Vikramaditya	4 th cent. CE	Madhya Pradesh/Bihar (India)	75
7.5	Bhoja, the Royal Patron of Arts	11 th cent. CE	Madhya Pradesh (India)	77
7.6	Raja Raja Chola I, the Humble Emperor	Ruled 985 – 1014 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	79
7.7	Rajendra Chola I, the Great Emperor	Ruled 1014–1044 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	81
7.8	Ānandapāla Shāhī	Ruled 1001-1010 CE	Afghanistan/Pakistan	81
7.9	Chandrāpīḍa, the King who Begged	c. 720 CE	Kashmir (India)	82
8.0	Devotees of Shiva, Ganesha and Karttikeya from South India			84
8.1	Karaikal Ammaiyar	6 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	84
8.2	Sambandhār, the Child Saint	7 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	85
8.3	Appār – Sevā as Worship	7 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	86

8.4	Nandanār, the Untouchable Saint	8 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	87
8.5	Sant Poosalār, whose Heart became a Temple	6 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	87
8.6	Chenthanār, the Woodcutter Saint	10 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	88
8.7	Bāsaveshvara, an Avatāra of Nandi	1105 – 1168 CE	Karnataka (India)	90
8.8	Akkā Mahādevī, the Shivabhakta & Yogini	c. 1130 – 1160 CE	Karnataka (India)	92
8.9	Pothanā, the Farmer Saint	1400 – 1475 CE	Telangana (India)	93
8.10	Molla, The Saintly Daughter of a Potter	1440 – 1530 CE	Andhra Pradesh (India)	94
8.11	Yogī Vemannā, Sinner turned Saint	1652 – 1730 CE	Andhra Pradesh (India)	95
8.12	Devar Dasimaiyya	10 th cent. CE	Karnataka (India)	97
8.13	Ramalingam Adigal Vallalar	19 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	98
8.14	Chidambar Dikshit	18 th cent. CE	Karnataka (India)	99
8.15	Alagumuttu Pulavar	18 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	100
8.16	Avvaiyar, the Wise Granny	1 st – 2 nd cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	100
8.17	Tiruneelanakar Nayanmar and his Wife	7 th cent CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	103
9.0	Devotees of Vishnu from South India			104
9.1	Poygari Alvar, Pey Alvar and Pudatt Alvar	5 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	104
9.2	Nammalvar, the Mute who Sang for Vishnu	9 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	104
9.3	Andāl, the Bride of Vishnu	10 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	105
9.4	Ananthāchārya, the Saint who Hurt Vishnu	12 th cent. CE	Andhra Pradesh (India)	106
9.5	Kanakadāsa, the Shepherd Saint	1509 - 1606 CE	Karnataka (India)	106
9.6	Purandara Dāsa, the Miser turned Saint	1484 – 1564 CE	Karnataka (India)	107
9.7	Bhadrāchalam Rāmadāsa, whom Rama forgave	1620 – 1680 CE	Telangana (India)	110
9.8	Tyāgarāja – Music as a Way to reach Rama	1767 - 1847 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	111
9.9	Poonthanam, the saint who knew no Sanskrit	1547 – 1640 CE	Kerala (India)	112
9.10	Karur Amma and Bilvamangala	16 th – 17 th cent CE	Kerala (India)	113
9.11	Kulashekhara Alvar	8 th – 9 th cent. CE	Kerala (India)	114
10.0	The Achāryas: Saintly Scholars of Hindu Dharma			115
10.1	Shankarāchārya	~ 700 CE	Kerala (India)	115
10.2	Rāmānujāchārya	1017 – 1137 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	117
10.3	Madhvāchārya	1238 – 1317 CE	Karnataka (India)	119
10.4	Vallabhāchārya	1479 – 1531 CE	Chattisgarh (India)	120
10.5	Vachaspati Mishra	8 th cent. CE	Bihar (India)	121
10.6	Vedanta Deshika	14 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	123
10.7	Sadashiva Brahmendra Saraswati	18 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	123
10.8	Appayya Dikshita	1520 – 1593 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	124
11.0	The Nirguṇī Sants: Worshippers of a Formless Lord in North & West India			125
11.1	Rāmānanda, the Liberal Orthodox Saint	13 th -14 th cent. CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	125
11.2	Kabīr, the Weaver Saint	1440 – 1518 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	126
11.3	Dādu, the Cotton Trader turned Saint	1544 – 1603 CE	Gujarat (India)	128
11.4	Sena, the Barber Saint	16 th - 17 th cent. CE	Madhya Pradesh (India)	129
11.5	Ravidās, the Cobbler Saint	c. 1450 - 1520 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	130
12.0	Saints of Maharashtra/Gujarat (India) and Sindh (Pakistan)			131
12.1	Pundalīka – The Devoted Son	13 th cent. CE	Karnataka/Maharashtra (India)	131
12.2	Nāmadeva, Who saw God in a Dog	1270 – 1350 CE	Maharashtra (India)	132
12.3	Chokhamela, the Untouchable Friend of God	14 th cent. CE	Maharashtra (India)	134
12.4	Jnāneshvara, the Teenager Saint	1275- 1296 CE	Maharashtra (India)	135

12.5	Ekanāth, the Compassionate Saint	1533 – 1599 CE	Maharashtra (India)	137
12.6	Tukārām – Seeking Bhagavān in Sorrow	1608 – 1649 CE	Maharashtra (India)	139
12.7	Bahinābāi, the Housewife Saint	1628 – 1700 CE	Maharashtra (India)	141
12.8	Kūrmadāsa - Disabled in Body, Able in Bhakti	13 th –14 th cent CE	Maharashtra (India)	142
12.9	Narsi Mehta – Forsaken by Men, Cared for by the Lord	1414 – 1481 CE	Gujarat (India)	143
12.10	Ballala, the Child devotee of Ganesha		Maharashtra (India)	145
12.11	Jhulelāl Sāin – Savior of Sindhi Hindus	10 th cent. CE	Sindh (Pakistan)	146
12.12	Narahari Sonar, who saw Vishnu but felt Shiva		Maharashtra (India)	147
12.13	Wadhuram Khilnani, the saintly Grocer	1868 – 1929 CE	Sindh (Pakistan)	148
12.14	Damaji Pant, the Compassionate Official	13 th cent. CE	Maharashtra (India)	149
13.0	Saints of Eastern India and Bangladesh			151
13.1	Jayadeva, the Poet Saint of Krishna an Radha	13 th cent. CE	Odhisha (India)	151
13.2	Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, the Dancing Saint	1486 – 1514 CE	West Bengal (India)	153
13.3	Haridās Thākūr – Suffering for the sake of Dharma	1451 – 16 th cent CE	Bangladesh	155
13.4	Sanātana Goswāmī & Jīva Goswāmī	1488-1558; 1513-1598 CE	West Bengal (India)	156
13.5	Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda–Taking the Message of Vaishnava Hinduism to the West	1896 – 1977 CE	West Bengal (India)	157
13.6	Shankar Dev and Madhav Dev	1449 – 1569 CE	Assam (India)	159
13.7	Mahendra Dev – For whom Krishna bore Witness	?	Odisha (India)	161
13.8	Madhusudana Sarasvati – from scholar to Bhakta	16 th cent.	Bangladesh	163
14.0	Saints of Nepal, Kashmir and Punjab			165
14.1	Sankhadhar Sākhwā, The Savior of Nepalese	9 th cent. CE	Kathmandu (Nepal)	165
14.2	Lalleshvarī, the Earliest Bhakti Sant of Kashmir	1320 – 1392 CE	Kashmir (India)	165
14.3	Guru Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism	1469 - 1539 CE	West Punjab (Pakistan)	166
14.4	Bābā Lāl Dayāl – the long-lived Saint	1412 – 1712 CE	West Punjab (Pakistan)	171
14.5	Guru Arjan Dev, an exemplar of humility	1563 – 1606 CE	Punjab (India)	171
14.5	Guru Tegh Bahādūr – Choosing Death over Forced Conversion	1621 – 1675 CE	Punjab (India)	172
15.0	Bhakta Saints from North India and Pakistan			174
15.1	Goswāmī Tulsidās – the Hindi Vālmiki	1532 – 1623 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	174
15.2	Sūrdās – the Blind Saint who saw Krishna	1478 – 1573 CE	Delhi (India)	178
15.3	Mīrābāi – The Princess who married Krishna	1498 – 1546 CE	Rajasthan (India)	180
15.4	Angad Singh	15 th cent. CE	Madhya Pradesh (India)	181
15.5	Raskhan, the Muslim who fell in love with Krishna	16 th cent. CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	183
15.6	Goswāmī Lāl Jī – the Orphan who was adopted by Krishna	1551-1618 CE	Sindh (Pakistan)	184
15.7	Sati Kewal Rām, the Hindu Miracle-worker in a Muslim society	1617-1678 CE	West Punjab (Pakistan)	185
15.8	Sultan, the Muslim boy devoted to Krishna	17 th cent. CE	Rajasthan (India)	186
16.0	Hindu Kings of Medieval & Modern Period			188
16.1	Kings of Vijayanagara – Savors of Hindu Dharma	1336 – 1565 CE	Tamil Nadu/ Andhra Pradesh/ Karnataka (India)	188
16.2	Mahārāṇā Pratāp of Mewar, Lion of Mewār	1540 – 1597 CE	Rajasthan (India)	189

16.3	King Chhatrasāl of Bundelkhand and his Guru Mahāmati Prāṇnāth	17 th – 18 th cent CE	Chhatisgarh and Gujarat (India)	191
16.4	Emperor Shivāji and his Guru Swami Samarthā Rāmadāsa	17 th cent. CE	Karnataka/Maharashtra (India)	192
16.5	Hindu Kings of Indonesia	5 th – 16 th cent CE	Indonesia	197
16.6	Khmer Kings of Kampuchea	6 th – 14 th cent CE	Kampuchea	198
16.7	Maharaja Raṇjīt Singh, the Lion of Punjab	1780 – 1839 CE	W. Punjab (Pakistan)	199
16.8	Maharaja Pratāp Singh, the Lion of Kashmir	1848 – 1925 CE	Jammu & Kashmir (India)	201
16.9	Birsā Mundā, Ruler of Tribal Hindu Hearts	1875 – 1900 CE	Jharkhand (India)	201
17.0	Brave & Dharmic Hindu Women			203
17.1	Dhārmic Queens of South East Asia	5 th – 16 th cent CE	Kampuchea, Indonesia	203
17.2	Queen Rudrāmbā, the Warrior Queen	Ruled 1259-1289 CE	Telangana (India)	203
17.3	The Dancer of Srirangam Temple	14 th cent. CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	203
17.3	Pannā Dhāi – Nation before Children	16 th cent CE	Rajasthan (India)	204
17.4	Rani Durgāvatī, The Tribal Hindu Queen	1524 – 1564 CE	Chhattisgarh (India)	204
17.5	Hādī Rani, Honor above Life	17 th cent. CE	Rajasthan (India)	205
17.6	Queen Ahilyābāi Holkar, the Dharmic Queen	1725 – 1795 CE	Maharashtra (India)	206
17.7	Rani Chenammā	1778 – 1829 CE	Karnataka (India)	209
17.8	Rani Lakshmibāi, India's Joan of Arc	1828 – 1858 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	209
17.9	Unniyarchā, the Protector of Hindu Women Pilgrims	16 th cent. CE	Kerala (India)	211
18.0	Clever, Witty and Humorous Hindus			212
18.1	Raja Bīrbal	16 th cent. CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	212
18.2	Tenāli Raman	16 th cent. CE	Andhra Pradesh (India)	215
18.3	Gopāl Bhar the Jester	18 th cent. CE	Bengal (India)	217
19.0	Bhaktas and Saints devoted to the Devī			220
19.1	Thayumanavar – Seeing Devī in Every Girl	1706 – 1744 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	220
19.2	Hakikat Rāi Purī, the Fearless Devī-Bhakta	Early 18 th cent. CE	W Punjab (Pakistan)	220
19.3	Rāmakrishna Paramahansa, the Child of Kālī	1836 – 1886 CE	W Bengal (India)	221
19.4	Rani Rasmani, the Patron of a Saint	1793 – 1861 CE	W Bengal (India)	223
19.5	Nāg Mahāshay, the Ideal Householder Doctor	1846 – 1899 CE	Bangladesh	224
19.6	Swami Vivekananda, the Cyclonic Hindu Monk	1863 – 1902 CE	W Bengal (India)	225
19.7	Sister Nivedita, A Friend of the Hindus	1867 – 1911 CE	Ireland	230
19.8	Ramprasad Sen	1723 – 1803 CE	W Bengal (India)	231
20.0	Modern Hindu Reformer Saints			233
20.1	Swami Sahajānanda (Swaminarayan)	1781 – 1830 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	234
20.2	Ishvarachandra Vidyāsāgara, the Scholar Reformer	1820 – 1891 CE	West Bengal (India)	237
20.3	Aramuga Namalvar, the Sri Lankan Reformer	1822 – 1879 CE	Jaffna (Sri Lanka)	239
20.4	Swami Dayananda Saraswati – Reviver of Vedic Learning	1824 – 1883 CE	Gujarat (India)	240
	• Pandit Gurudutt, the Young Scholar	1864 – 1890 CE	Multan (Pakistan)	243
20.5	Narayana Guru – Make your own Way	1854 – 1928 CE	Kerala (India)	244
21.0	Modern Hindu Leaders			247
21.1	Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya	1861 – 1946 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	247
21.2	Mahatma Gandhi, the Apostle of Ahimsā	1869 – 1948 CE	Gujarat (India)	248
21.3	Satyānand Stokes, the Christian Hindu Missionary	1882 – 1946 CE	Pennsylvania (USA)	250
21.4	Sadhu Shivadas, a true Bhakta of Hanuman	19 th – 20 th cent CE	Trinidad & Tobago	251

21.5	M. S. Golwalkar, the Guru of Organized Hindus	1906 – 1973 CE	Maharashtra (India)	251
21.6	Pandit Shanker Dev Pant, the Karmayogi	19 th – 20 th cent CE	Nepal	252
21.7	Swami Ghanananda – The African Hindu Saint	1937 – 2016 CE	Ghana (Africa)	252
22.0	Modern Hindu Saints, Gurus & Scholars			254
22.1	Swami Bankhandi, Creator of a new Teertha	1763 – 1863 CE	Nepal, Sindh (Pakistan)	254
22.2	Jalarām Bapā and Vīrbāī and their Sadāvrata	1799 – 1881 CE	Gujarat (India)	255
22.3	Swami Rāmatīrtha, the Youthful Saint	1873 – 1906 CE	West Punjab (Pakistan)	257
22.4	Dokka Sītammā, an Avatāra of Annapūrṇa	1841 – 1909 CE	Andhra Pradesh (India)	258
22.5	Ramana Maharshi, the Saint who knew Himself	1879 – 1950 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	259
22.6	Sri Aurobindo, the Mystic	1872 – 1950 CE	W Bengal (India)	260
22.7	Swami Sivananda, Physician of the Soul	1887 – 1963 CE	Tamil Nadu (India)	261
22.8	Mā Anandamoyi, the Smiling Saint	1896 – 1982 CE	Bangladesh	262
22.9	Shri Ram Sharma Acharya, the Scholar Saint	1911 – 1990 CE	Uttar Pradesh (India)	263
22.10	Swami Chinmayananda, The Teacher	1916 – 1993 CE	Kerala (India)	264
22.11	Satguru Shivaya Subramaniaswami and his Guru Swami Yogaswami – Founders of an American Hindu Sampradāya	1927 – 2001 CE 1872 – 1964 CE	California/ Hawaii (USA) Jaffna (Sri Lanka)	265
	Map of the Indian Subcontinent			268
	Map of the World			269
	Timeline: Chronology of Great Hindus			270
	Select Bibliography			271

Acknowledgements: I am indebted to the following for providing me some information over the years that went into the writing of this book for students – Professor Vasudha Narayanan, Dr. Dasharath Lohar, Dinesh Goel, Shyamala Ganesh, Shankar Rajgopal, Rachna Bhatia, Michel Danino, Alamelu Veerapandian, Dr. Lavanya Poduri and Dr. Shashikant Sane.

© Vishal Agarwal: This book may be distributed in any form for non-commercial purposes for teaching about Hindu Dharma. Any money that is collected by the author from sales is donated to Hindu institutions.

Revision A dt. 20th June 2016 (Teacher’s Version)

For any corrections or suggestions, please write to vishalsagarwal@yahoo.com



A Note to Teachers and Parents

Hindu Dharma is the oldest and the third largest religious-spiritual tradition in the world. Through its branches and related Dharmic traditions (e.g. Buddhism), Hindu Dharma has impacted more than a third of the world's population. This influence, through thousands of great Hindu men and women, has been not just in the area of spirituality, but also extends over many other disciplines like politics, science, mathematics, arts, music and grammar.

In this compilation, instead of narrating the entire life story of these great Hindus, we have often restricted ourselves to a few age-appropriate, inspiring and informative episodes in their lives for the sake of brevity. Readers can learn more about their lives by reading the books mentioned in the Bibliography section. Keeping in view the global influence of Hindu traditions, examples have been given from many countries, although the bulk of them are from India. An attempt has been made to represent both genders, and as many traditions within Hindu Dharma as possible. The demarcation between Hindu and Sikh faiths is recent, and is still not very clear. In fact, traditional Hindu compilations of the biographies or writings of multiple saints frequently include those of the Sikh Gurus. Therefore, episodes from their lives have also been incorporated.

Although the sections are arranged largely in a chronological sequence, it was felt necessary to club together some modern personalities (e.g. J C Bose) with ancient ones when their claim to fame belonged to the same theme. Included in this anthology are:

1. Rishis, Saints, Bhaktas, modern Gurus and scholars
2. Social reformers
3. Rulers, political leaders and political theorists
4. Scientists, mathematicians, botanists, physicians, astronomers etc.
5. Grammarians, poets and dramatists
6. Witty, clever and worldly wise individuals.

The personalities discussed in this book are women as well as men, rich and poor, ancient and modern, Indian and non-Indian and are from humble or privileged family backgrounds. The episodes from their lives discuss how they reacted to or impacted different life situations, and provided us with ideal examples to live by. Hindu scriptures say that we must “never investigate the origins of Rishis, noble women or rivers” because most of them actually had very humble origins. They became great not because of where they were born but because of their wisdom, knowledge, character and teachings. **The ideals set by the virtuous (Sadāchāra) are regarded as an important source of Dharma in the Hindu tradition. This book may be considered as a brief compendium on Sadāchāra.**

Hindu Dharma is a vast and a deep ocean. It is impossible to teach about even a small fraction of great Hindu men and women in any textbook, let alone in a book meant for young students. There is no malicious intent behind leaving out hundreds of great Hindu personalities in this anthology. The only guiding agenda has been to give the children an all-inclusive overview of the lives of great Hindus across space and time so that they may learn from them. The book is meant for children who are around ten years of age.

Teachers can choose only a subset of the anecdotes or lives in this textbook, leaving the rest for home reading. They can also supplement these biographies with those of personalities not covered here. The textbook gives a few verses and bhajans that students could learn to sing during the year. Creative plays on the lives of these characters can also be enacted. The purpose of this book is to draw inspiration from the traditional narratives of the lives of these great Hindus and learn how Dharma should be practiced. The book does not claim to represent completely accurate history. For example, we cannot prove that the stories about Birbal's wit really happened. The primary goal of this book is Dharmic education, not historical understanding.

1. Ancient Rishis: The Founders of Hindu Civilization

1.0 Sanātana Hindu Dharma and its Rishis and Rishikās:

Every religion except Hindu Dharma has a known historical founder. For example, Christianity was founded by Jesus Christ, who lived from 4 BCE to 30 CE. Before him, there was no Christianity. Similarly, Guru Nanak, who lived from 1469 – 1539 CE, founded Sikhism. Before him, Sikhism did not exist. But, Hindu Dharma has existed for thousands of years. No single person founded it. Therefore, we Hindus say that our religion is ‘Sanātana Dharma’ which means ‘Eternal Dharma’ with no beginning in time that we know of, and no end. Therefore, Bhagavān himself is the founder and protector of our Hindu Dharma.

The message of Bhagavān was heard by and taught to others by thousands of noble men and women who were called Rishis and Rishikās. Many of these Rishis and Rishikās received teachings directly from Īshvara which were later compiled in works called the Vedas. The Vedas are the four holiest books of the Hindus. The names of these books are Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Many other Rishis composed their own works which include the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas and so on. All of these works are treated as scriptures or holy books by the Hindus.

These scriptures teach us how to live like good humans, do our duty towards others, and they also show us the ways to reach Bhagavān. Many other religions have only one scripture. But, Hindu Dharma has many other scriptures besides the Vedas because the vast wisdom and teachings of our Rishis could not fit into a single book.

Class Exercise: Can you match the contents of the two columns below correctly. Which is the oldest religion in the world and which is the youngest?

Name of Religion	Name of Founder and his date
Hindu Dharma (Sanātana Dharma)	Jesus Christ (-4 BCE to 30 CE)
Christianity	Gautama Buddha (563 – 483 BCE)
Judaism	Lao Tzu (around 600 BCE)
Islam	Mahāvīra (599 – 527 BCE)
Buddhism	Bhagavān through the Rishis and Rishikās (before 2000 BCE)
Sikhism	Bahauddin (1817 – 1892 CE)
Jainism	Muhammad (570 – 632 CE)
Zoroastrianism	Moses (around 1500 BCE)
Bahā’i Religion	Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539 CE)
Taoism	Zarathustra (around 1500 BCE)

The Rishis and Rishikās were great men and women in the ancient Hindu society who were able to experience Bhagavān within themselves because they followed Dharma and performed spiritual practices like meditation. Although Rishis are found in all religions, we Hindus are really blessed to have had hundreds of them. Rishis and Rishikās lived not just in the ancient times. Many of them have lived in modern times too. Let us now read incidents from the lives of some of the first Rishis and Rishikās who were the pioneers of Hindu Dharma.

1.1 Story: Rishi Bharadvāja realizes knowledge is endless¹

Some Rishis in the Hindu tradition are said to have lived a very long life. One of them was Rishi Bharadvāja. A beautiful story is narrated about his love for the study of the Vedas. He spent his long life of 100 years studying the Vedas.

Pleased with his love for the scriptures, the King of Devas named Indra appeared before the Rishi and asked:



“If I were to increase your life by another 100 years, what would you want to do?” Rishi Bharadvāja replied, “I would spend the next 100 years again in studying the Vedas.” Indra increased his life, and returned to see the Rishi when he was 200 years old.

Indra then asked Rishi Bharadvāja, “And if I were to increase your life by another 100 years, then?” The Rishi said, “I would like to spend my next 100 years too to continue studying the Vedas.”

Indra then created three mountains of sand in front of the Rishi, and said, “These three mountains represent Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda. And from each mountain, your study is but a fistful of sand because endless are the Vedas (anantā vai vedāh). The more we study these scriptures, the more new things we learn every time.”

Rishi Bharadvāja was amazed, and realized that there is no end to studying the scriptures. Indra was pleased and said, “Well, you have studied enough. You will now reach Bhagavān very soon.”

Today, we Hindus regard Rishi Bharadvāja as one of the seven greatest Rishis who ever lived. He was respected a lot. Even Bhagavān Rama went to visit him at the beginning as well at the end

of his fourteen years long exile in the forest out of respect.

Discussion: We see how Rishi Bharadvāja spent all the time he had to study the Vedas. How much time do you take every day to study your school textbooks? Did Rishi Bharadvāja ever think that he knows everything and therefore he will study no more? Did he ever get tired of studying?

1.2 Rishi Agastya: How Hindu culture was spread all over India and abroad

Rishi Agastya was the first Rishi who travelled from northern India to spread the teachings of Vedas in South India. In those days, an evil king named Rāvaṇa terrorized Rishis and other holy men in south India. He had also kidnapped Sītā, the wife of Bhagavān Rama. In fact, Rāvaṇa was none other than Agastya’s nephew, because Rāvaṇa’s father Vishravā was Agastya’s brother. To vanquish Rāvaṇa, Agastya gave a divine weapon to Bhagavān Rama. Just before the final battle between Rama and Rāvaṇa, Rishi Agastya appeared in the battlefield and taught the stotra called ‘Aditya Hridayam’ to Rama. Bhagavān Rama chanted the stotra thrice, and was filled with strength and energy of the sun. He was successful in defeating and killing Rāvaṇa. Everyone in south India heaved a sigh of relief at Rāvaṇa’s death. In this example, we see how Agastya did not hesitate to kill his own nephew because he was terrorizing innocent people. This episode teaches us that we must always side



¹ Source: Yajurveda, Taittiriya Brahmana 3.10.11 (adapted)

with Dharma even if we have to go against our own family members.

Once, there was a drought in South India. Therefore, Agastya went to Mount Kailash in Tibet (China) and asked Bhagavān Shiva for some waters to take back. Shiva asked him to collect water from Ganga River in a pot. When Agastya reached South India, he rested his pot on the ground. Bhagavān Ganesha took the form of a crow and toppled the pot. The water that flowed out of the pot became the River Kāverī, which has since then continued to irrigate many parts of South India for thousands of years. Therefore, thanks to Rishi Agastya and Ganesha, South India became a very fertile region. It is said that once Bhagavān Shiva played his *damaru* and the sounds of Sanskrit came from its one side, and those of Tamil from the other. Rishi Agastya recorded the Tamil letters and then wrote the first book on Tamil grammar. Later, he also wrote many books on medicine (called Siddha medicine) which are used even today.

People of Indonesia believe that Rishi Agastya came to visit their country from South India, and brought the Hindu culture to them. Therefore, the Rishi was worshipped in Indonesia. Archaeologists² have found mūrtīs of Rishi Agastya in old Hindu temples of Indonesia, one of which is shown on the right.

The life of Rishi Agastya shows that like him, we must take our culture wherever we go and share its good things with others. But do you remember how he did it? He did not impose his own Sanskrit language on others. Instead, he wrote the grammar of the Tamil language that people spoke in a region in South India, and wrote his books on medicine etc., in Tamil. Similarly, when we move to a new region, we must not destroy the culture of that place or impose our own culture there. Instead, we should learn the language and culture of our new home, and also teach our own culture to the people there. And just like Agastya gave many good things to his new home, like the Siddha medicine, the Kāverī River, Tamil Grammar and so on, we should also contribute positive things wherever we go.



Class Exercise: In the table below, we have listed a few good things from the Hindu as well as the Western culture. Can you add a few more items that Hindus from the east can teach, and also learn from the westerners?

No.	Good values in Hindu culture	Good values in Western cultures
1	Strong family values, respect for parents and grandparents.	Respect for rules and instructions.
2	Respect for mother nature. Not using too many resources for our personal consumption.	Punctuality.
3	Ahimsā – not hurting any living creature.	Equality
4	High educational pursuits.	Not interfering in other people’s work or lives.
5	Patience.	Volunteerism.
6	Strong belief in Yoga.	Good civic sense. Not littering public property like roads.
7	Social Service (Sevā): Doing good to others without expecting anything from them or from Bhagavān in return.	
8		

² An archaeologist is a trained person who explores ancient places, digs out old objects from under the ground, and studies them scientifically to understand how people of that area had lived in the past.

9		
10		

1.3 Rishi Bhrigu: Which is the greatest Form of Bhagavān?

One day, all the Rishis met together to decide which form of Bhagavān is the greatest. Rishi Bhrigu said, “Let me go and meet Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva. I will test them and find out which of these three is the greatest.”

First, Bhrigu went to see Brahma who was reading scriptures. Brahma was the father of Bhrigu, but Bhrigu did not even say Namaste to his father. Brahma got very angry and said to Bhrigu, “You are a foolish man. You do not even have good manners even though you are my own son.” But Sarasvati, the wife of Brahma, asked her husband to calm down.

Then, Bhrigu went to Mountain Kailash to see Bhagavān Shiva. When Shiva saw Bhrigu arrive, He rushed to embrace Bhrigu. But Bhrigu said to Shiva, “Stop, do not hug me. You have ashes on your body and are so dirty. I do not want to embrace you.” Shiva was so annoyed that He lifted his weapon to kill Bhrigu. But Devi Parvati requested Shiva to calm down.

Rishi Bhrigu then went to Vaikuntha, where Bhagavān Vishnu was taking a nap. Bhrigu went close to Vishnu and suddenly kicked His chest, without any reason. Bhagavān Vishnu immediately woke up. But instead of getting angry at Bhrigu, he smiled and said, “Respected Bhrigu, I am sorry for hurting you. My chest



is very strong and hard. I hope your foot did not get hurt. Let me give your foot a massage.”

Rishi Bhrigu was very impressed with Bhagavān Vishnu’s behavior. He went back and told all the other Rishis that Bhagavān Vishnu is greatest because He does not get angry, and forgives even those who hurt Him.



Note: This story does not really mean that Vishnu is superior to Shiva and Brahmā. The different

Forms of Bhagavān merely enact these plays to set up a good example for us and teach us good things. We humans tend to learn faster if an example in the form of a story is given. That is why Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva enacted this incident to convey the virtue of forgiveness to us.

There is another important message that we learn from Rishi Bhrigu. Most of us give greater importance to people who are powerful, and who scare us by their angry nature. And we often ignore those who are

respectful, polite and kind to us. Rishi Bhṛigu could have declared Brahmā or Shiva as the greatest Form of Bhagavān out of fear or timidity. Instead, he opted for Bhagavān Vishnu, who was very polite, kind and respectful towards the Rishi. Similarly, we should give more importance to people who truly love us, forgive us, and are kind to us, than to people who threaten us with their power, or scare us with their anger.

1.4 Rishi Vashishtha teaches Vishvamitra about our Six Greatest Enemies

Rishi Vashishtha is famous in the Hindu tradition for his forgiveness. In his earlier years, King Vishvaratha, who later became Rishi Vishvamitra, was a great enemy of Vashishtha. But by forgiving Vishvaratha, Rishi Vashishtha made him realize that his real enemy was not Vashishtha. Instead, he had six other real enemies that he had to defeat. Let us read the story to find out who these real enemies were.

King Vishvaratha (the name means “whose chariot treads the entire earth”, i.e., a powerful Emperor) was once on a hunting expedition with his soldiers. They felt very tired and hungry after a long day of hunting activity and were looking for a place to rest and eat. They happened to come across a small āshrama (i.e., forest dwelling in which Rishis live a simple life) of Brahmarshi Vashishtha.³ The Rishi greeted them and enquired about their needs. After learning of their needs, he asked his magical cow Kāmadhenu to do give whatever was needed to make the guests comfortable. Kāmadhenu magically produced all the food that the army could eat. Vishvaratha was amazed at the powers of the cow.

Overcome with *lobha*⁴ (greed) to have Kāmadhenu, Vishvaratha argued with Vashishtha that this cow would be more useful to a King like him, whereas Vashishtha would fill the needs of his small hermitage with perhaps a few ordinary cows. He offered



as many cows as Vashishtha wanted, in return for Kāmadhenu. But Vashishtha said, “King Vishvaratha, the divine cow can only remain with one who has realized the Truth. You already have many cows. Why do you need mine? Moreover, such a cow could not be treated disrespectfully like a toy that can be given to another as a gift.” But being very greedy and having been refused by Vashishtha, King Vishvaratha became very angry (*krodha*)⁵ and started a fight. He tried to drag the cow forcibly to his palace.

During the fight, Kāmadhenu produced many soldiers and weapons and Vishvaratha’s army was defeated. The arrogance (*mada*)⁶ of Vishvaratha (after all, he was a king) led him to challenge Vashishtha directly. But all the weapons that Vishvaratha could hurl at Vashishtha were swallowed by the Sage’s staff (*brahmadanda*) of Vashishtha. In the end, Vishvaratha himself was felled by the *brahmadanda*. Seeing the plight of the mighty king, Rishi Vashishtha, who was a man of great compassion and kindness, forgave the king.

But Vishvaratha still hated Vashishtha in his heart. Therefore, he got all the sons of Vashishtha killed. When Sage Vashishtha heard that all of his sons had been killed, he was filled with deep grief and decided to end his own life. But not once did he bear any anger towards Vishvamitra,

³ A Brahmarshi is the highest category of Rishi.

⁴ Enemy number 1.

⁵ Enemy number 2.

⁶ Enemy number 3

and not once did he desire to take revenge by killing Vishvamitra and his family. In a state of deep sorrow, Sage Vashishtha hurled himself from a cliff, but the bottom of the cliff became as soft as a heap of cotton and his head did not get injured at all. He entered a burning forest, but the fire refused to burn him. Then, he tied a stone around his neck and jumped into the ocean to drown himself, but the waves washed him ashore. The Sage then decided to bind himself in chains and jumped into the river Beas⁷ in northern India. But the river currents cut his chains and threw him ashore. Sage Vashishtha then hurled himself in river Sutlej⁸ in northern India, thinking that the ferocious crocodiles in the river will chew him to death. But even this river respected the Sage so much that it split into a 100 shallow channels, throwing the Sage onto a dry ground. Sage Vashishtha then thought – “Perhaps God does not want me to die by committing suicide. I will go back to my Ashram as I have been away from it for several years.”

As he approached his Ashram, he heard the sound of a young child, resembling that of his own dead son Shakti (when he was a young boy) reciting the Vedas beautifully. His widowed daughter-in-law, who lived in the Ashram explained – “Before my husband Shakti died, I was expecting his child, and this little boy is my womb is that child and your grandson named Parāshara.” Sage Vashishtha was overjoyed on seeing his grandson, and got a new reason to live. Soon thereafter, his grandson Parāshara was born. Sage Vashishtha took care of the little boy for several years. Innocent Parāshara thought that Sage Vashishtha, his grandfather, was his father. One day, he actually addressed Vashishtha as ‘Dad’ in the presence of his mother. As a result, his mother was filled with sorrow and remembered her dead husband. She told Parāshara that Vashishtha was actually his grand-father and he should not therefore address him as ‘Dad’. She also told him how his own father Shakti was killed in a most cruel manner because of King Vishvaratha.

When Parāshara heard this, he was filled with anger. He said – “This world is so cruel. My father was innocent and yet he was killed for no fault of his. My grandfather was kind to me and yet he hid this fact from me while raising me lovingly. I will destroy this whole world with my spiritual powers because it so full of evil people.” But Sage Vashishtha reasoned with his grandson through stories of great sages that it is not good to be angry and one should give up anger and forgive. And therefore, Parāshara decided not to proceed with his decision to destroy the whole world. Parāshara too let go his anger, and forgave the murderers of his father. Instead, he devoted himself completely to his spiritual advancement and to the study of Vedas. In course of time, he became a great Rishi and authored many Hindu scriptures. But most important, he gave birth to Sage Veda Vyasa, who became the greatest Rishi of Hindu Dharma.

The story shows that anger and hatred can sometimes lead us into a downward spiral of anger-hatred-revenge-anger-hatred-revenge; eventually leading all of us toward destruction. Anger cannot be fought with anger, and hatred should not be countered with hatred. Instead, just as Sage Vashishtha, we should counter violence, anger and hatred with forgiveness, love and kindness. Often, nothing is gained through anger, hatred and revenge. We should learn to put these things behind us, and instead focus on advancing ourselves in the right direction.

Vishvaratha had not given up his wish for revenge. He felt humiliated and insulted. He resolved to learn the Truth by doing meditation. He decided to renounce his family and kingdom and meditate in order to realize the truth. He also entertained the idea that by doing meditation, he would acquire enough powers to retaliate against Vashishtha.

Vishvaratha did not know the fundamentals of meditation. He could have gone to Vashishtha or another Guru for proper instruction. But his ego was so big that he would not do so. By sheer will power, he focused his mind on Bhagavān Shiva. The intensity of his prayers produced tremendous heat from his head and the billowing smoke travelled towards the sky. Indra, the head of the Devatās in heaven, was very worried that Vishvaratha would acquire great Yogic powers and would be a menace to all. In order to disturb Vishvaratha’s concentration, he sent a divine nymph named Menakā to the place where Vishvaratha was meditating. Menakā was a beautiful and an exquisite dancer. Her song and dance disturbed Vishvaratha’s concentration. Opening his eyes, he saw this beautiful woman and immediately, his Kāma⁹ (lust or desire) made him fall in love with her. Forgetting his resolve to realize the Truth, he married Menakā. Soon thereafter, they were the parents of a baby girl Shakuntalā. One day, Vishvaratha recalled his original goal and decided to leave Menakā and the child and return to the depths of the forest to resume his

⁷ For this reason, the river Beas is called ‘Vipāshā’ in Sanskrit. This word means, ‘that which cuts all the chains.’

⁸ For this reason, the river Satluj is called ‘Shatadru’ in Sanskrit. This name means, ‘the river with a hundred flows.’

⁹ Enemy number 4.

austerities. Menakā too went to her home in the skies, and left the daughter Shakuntalā in the hermitage of Rishi Kaṇva, who brought her up as his own daughter out of compassion for the abandoned child.



Vishvaratha now resumed his meditation with even greater concentration and prayed with greater devotion. The ensuing heat from his austerities made Indra very nervous. This time, he sent another beautiful dancer named Rambhā to distract Vishvaratha. When Vishvaratha got distracted from his deep concentration, he opened his eyes and saw Rambha. This time, instead of *Kāma*, *Krodha* (anger) once again took hold of him. Infuriated by her distractions, he cursed Rambhā and turned her into a stone. All the powers that he had acquired as a result of his tapasyā (spiritual efforts) were destroyed in a moment of anger. Not wanting to give up his determination to humiliate Vashishtha, Vishvaratha resumed his austerities.

During that time, there was a king named Trishanku who wanted to reach heaven in his human body. The performance of the Vedic Yajna was a way he could have fulfilled his request. He went to his Guru Vashishtha and requested him to officiate as the priest in the Yajna. But Vashishtha refused Trishanku's request. He said that Hindu scriptures prohibit going to heaven in one's present earthly body. Disappointed at the turn of events, Trishanku approached Vishvaratha with his request. Now Vishvaratha thought that this is the right opportunity to humiliate Vashishtha. He did not consider the fact that no one can ascend to heaven in his earthly body, and was overpowered by the delusion (*moha*)¹⁰ that he could somehow do this for Trishanku.

Therefore, he agreed to perform the Yajna for Trishanku.

By the power of the Yajna performed by Vishvaratha, Trishanku started rising from the earth and ascended towards heaven. Seeing this improbable sight, the Devatās wanted to push Trishanku from reaching heaven and they pushed him back towards the earth. When Vishvaratha saw this, he stopped Trishanku in mid-air and created a new heaven for him. This is called Trishanku heaven and it shines as a star in the sky even today. Vishvaratha realized that no one can ascend to heaven in one's earthly body and by realizing that spiritual things are different from earthly things, he overcame his delusion (*moha*). But as he had promised to Trishanku that he will take him to heaven, he created this parallel heaven.



Once again, Vishvaratha had used up all his powers having been overpowered with *moha*. He resolved to try regaining them once again through austerities. Pleased with his devotion, Bhagavān Brahmā appeared to him and blessed him with the title 'Maharshi.' But Vishvaratha was not happy with this and said out of jealousy, "Just a Maharshi? I deserved the higher title of Brahmarshi." But Brahmā said, "You can get that title and status only if you are blessed by Brahmarshi Vashishtha.

Now Vishvaratha really got frustrated but his mada (pride and arrogance) did not allow him to go to Vashishtha and ask for his blessings. He was overcome with anger and *mātsarya*¹¹ (jealousy) towards Vashishtha, and he decided to kill Vashishtha to eliminate all competition! Armed with a big rock, he waited at night outside the door of Vashishtha's hut, thinking that he will hurl the stone at Brahmarshi Vashishtha the moment he comes out.

¹⁰ Enemy number 5.

¹¹ Enemy number 6.

He waited and waited. In the early hours of the morning, he heard Vashishtha saying to his wife, “Vishvaratha is a great man and is fully qualified to be a Brahmarshi. In fact, he is greater than I. I do not know why he has not come to see me yet.” When Vishvaratha heard these words of praise from none other than the person he hated out of jealousy, he felt very repentant. His feelings of jealousy, anger, frustration and ego disappeared for good. He went inside the hut and fell at Brahmarshi Vashishtha’s feet and said, “I had tried to kill you several times. I killed all your sons. Just to insult you, I tried several austerities. But despite that, you did not harbor any ill-will towards me. Look at me – I had come to kill you. But instead, I learn how much you respect me. What a degraded person I am. I hope my tears of repentance will make you forgive me.”

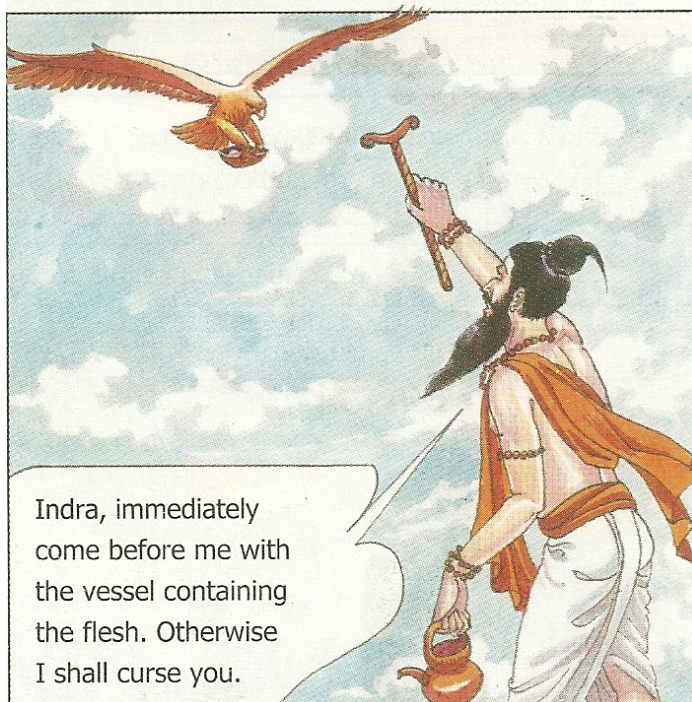
Vashishtha said, “Every person has six enemies – lust/desire, anger, greed, arrogance or ego, delusion and jealousy. You have overcome each one of them. You were led astray many times in your pursuit of Truth, but you never gave up. Finally, you conquered jealousy as well. I bless you and indeed, you are also a Brahmarshi from now on.”

As Vashishtha said these words, Devi Gāyatrī appeared in front of Vishvaratha and gave him the Gāyatrī Mantra, chanting which everyone in this world can come closer to Bhagavān. From that day, Vishvaratha became Vishvamitra (meaning ‘the friend of the entire world’). He became an eternal emperor in the true sense of the word, because his name became associated with the holiest mantra of Hindus.



Class discussion: Can you name all the six real and biggest enemies that all of us have? Which of these enemies do you think is the most important for you to defeat?

1.5 Rishi Vishvamitra shares the joys and sorrows of others out of Compassion



In the previous story, we read how King Vishvaratha became Brahmarshi Vishvamitra. Now, let us read a story of how Vishvamitra truly lived his name, which means, ‘the friend of all.’

Once, Rishi Vishvamitra and his disciples passed through a region that was struck with a devastating drought. There was no food to be had and the locals were starving. So the people of the area could obviously not give any food to the Rishi and his entourage as alms.

One of the Rishi’s students came to him and said, “The only thing I can find for us to eat is a carcass of a dog. But how can we eat rotting dog-flesh?” Rishi Vishvamitra said, “It is better to eat rotting dog meat than die of hunger. Bring the carcass here in my bowl. When he received the bowl, the Rishi sprinkled some holy water on it and prayed, “Our Dharma teaches us that before we eat anything, we should offer a portion to the Devatās in heaven. So I am offering the first piece to them.” Meanwhile, in heaven, the Devatās felt

embarrassed that the Rishi was dying of hunger and had been forced procure a dead dog. They also felt revolted that he should offer them the dog meat. Therefore, Indra, the King of Devatās, came down to earth disguised as a hawk and flew way with the bowl. The Rishi recognized Indra’s disguise and threatened to curse him. Then, Indra returned with a pitcher of Amrit (the nectar that gives immortality) and offered it to the Rishi saying, “I am sorry respected Rishi. That meat of dog is not fit for you and your students to eat. Instead, I have brought this pitcher of Amrit for you. Please throw away the meat in your bowl and drink this instead.”

When Rishi Vishvamitra heard Indra, he replied, “How dare you offer this Amrit to me and my students when everyone else in this area is dying of hunger? Their cattle have also died because you have not sent down any rains. All I found therefore was this dead dog to eat. So what is wrong if I offer a portion to you? After all, you are responsible for this. I am not a selfish person who would want to become immortal while everyone is dying around me. Therefore, bring back the vessel with the flesh, or I will curse you.”

Indra said, “Respected Rishi, I am moved by your compassion. You and your disciples could have drank the Amrit and become immortal. Yet, you did not forsake the people of this village who gave you shelter to die on their own. I will cause rains to come down to this region immediately.” It started pouring in the land, and once again, people were able to grow food and prevent starvation deaths. The people all thanked Rishi Vishvamitra for standing by them and giving up his own immortality for their sake. The place where this incident happened is today a holy place (teertha) for the Hindus, and is known as ‘Vishvamitra Teertha.’

This story shows that good human beings do not think only about their own happiness and prosperity. Instead, they want everyone to be happy even if it means that they have to give up their own happiness.

1.6 Rishi Nārada and his delightful stories



Rishi Nārada is a very interesting character in Hindu scriptures. He constantly travelled from one place to another, carrying news with him. Some people accused him of gossiping a lot. Therefore, in the Hindu society, when we come across a person who is in the habit of carrying tales, we refer to them as ‘Nārada Muni’. The word Muni means a Sage.

But in fact Nārada carried gossip from one place to another for two reasons. The first was to get evil people into trouble. His gossip resulted in numerous conflicts and battles, but they always had a good result. By his gossip, he was always pitting evil people against Bhagavān as a result of which the evil men either got reformed or they were defeated by good forces. The second reason why he carried tales was to give a valuable teaching to ordinary people like us, and many of his stories contain a very important message for us.

The name ‘Nārada’ has two meanings:

1. He who gives the knowledge of Nara-Nārāyaṇa.
2. He who takes away our ignorance.

Nārada was also a great musician. In his journeys, he constantly sang the praises of Bhagavān Vishnu and played the instrument Veenā, which is regarded as the oldest stringed musical instrument in the world. But, he did not become a great musician within a day. The first story below describes how he became the best musician only after he overcame his jealousy for Tumburu, who was the best musician of his times. Nārada’s book on music is studied even today by scholars.

Story: The Jealousy of Rishi Nārada makes him an Inferior Musician

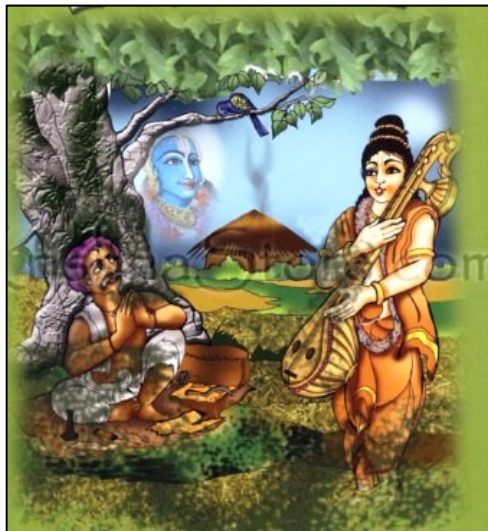


Gandharva Tumburu and Rishi Nārada were both great devotees of Vishnu. Once, they both went to Vaikuntha where Tumburu sang a melodious hymn in praise of Krishna. Pleased with his song, Krishna presented him many divine jewels and clothes. Nārada became jealous of Tumburu. He decided to please Bhagavān Shiva to learn music from Him and become the best musician. Shiva was pleased, but Krishna still did not feel impressed enough with his music to give jewels and clothes to Nārada as gifts.

Nārada then practiced music for several years in the hope that he would best Tumburu. But even that was not sufficient. Finally, Nārada decided to give up his jealousy and hatred towards Tumburu. Therefore, he approached Tumburu and requested him to teach music. Tumburu agreed, and taught Nārada all that he knew. Thereafter, Nārada went to Dwārakā and sang a song for Krishna who said, “Now your music is indeed wonderful, because it is not mixed with jealousy.” Saying this, Krishna then gave some divine gifts to

Nārada in appreciation.

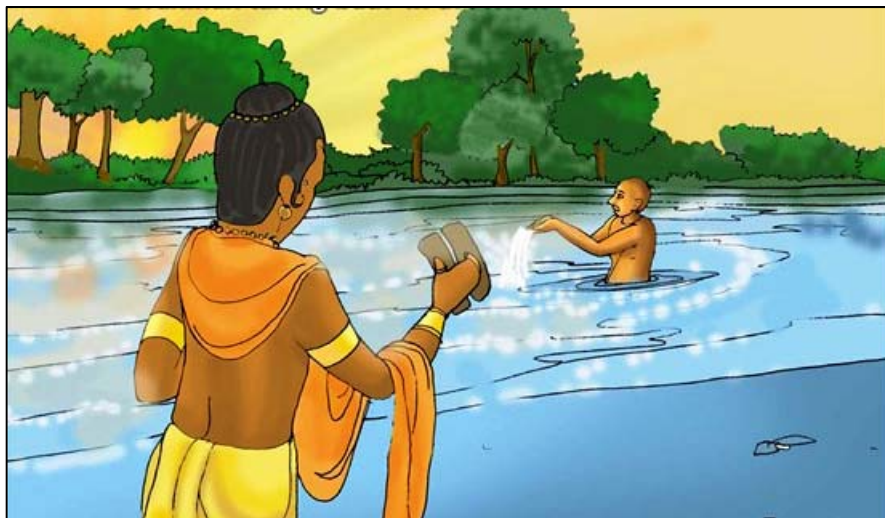
Story: Whom Does Bhagavān Vishnu grant Moksha?



Once, Sage Nārada was on his way to Vaikuntha, the abode of Bhagavān Vishnu when he encountered two Yogis meditating on Vishnu. One of them was a leather-worker (cobbler) who meditated under a tree. The other was a learned Brahmana who also meditated close by and performed all the ceremonies daily. They both asked Nārada to check with Vishnu as to how many more lives they would have to live through and meditate before they could see Vishnu.

Sage Nārada did, as requested. On his way back from Vaikuntha, he told the first Yogi (who was the cobbler), “Bhagavān Vishnu said that you will be reborn as many times as there are leaves on the tree under which you are meditating. So continue meditating for that number of lives, and then your Atman will merge with that of Vishnu.” The Yogi replied, “Blessed I am that Bhagavān Vishnu has put a limit to the number of my rebirths. I will now continue to meditate with even greater enthusiasm, because I see light at the end of the tunnel. I am just happy with the fact that Vishnu is pleased with me.”

The moment he had said this, Bhagavān Vishnu appeared and said, “My child! I will grant you Moksha (i.e. see Bhagavān) here and now because you meditated not for any selfish motive, but for My pleasure. You have all the qualities of a good Bhakta, and therefore, you do not have to be reborn even once anymore.”



Then, Nārada went further and encountered the second Yogi to whom he said, “You have earned the favor of Vishnu. The Lord of the Universe said that you need to be reborn only 5 more lives now.” The second Yogi, upon hearing this, fumed and fretted. He exclaimed, “I cannot believe that all my effort has so far been a waste. I spent my entire life meditating on Vishnu to get Moksha, and all I get is this! I think I deserved

better. I do not have the patience to meditate for more time, forget about five more lives.”

He rolled his meditation mat and gave up his faith in Vishnu. As a result, he became distracted from the path of Moksha. In fact, he never had selfless faith in Vishnu because he was meditating only with the fruit of Moksha in mind.

Story: Nārada learns that work is worship if it is done for Bhagavān

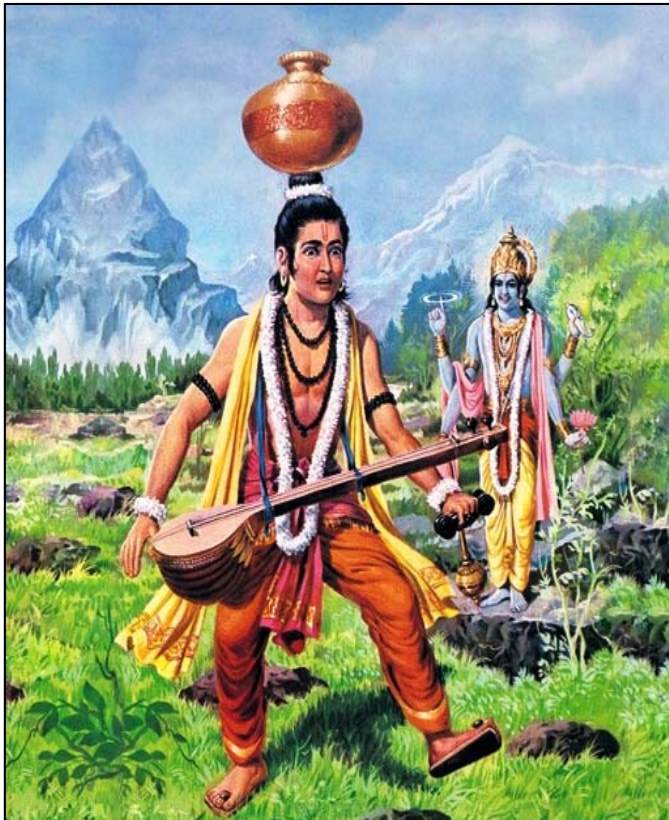
Nārada Muni travelled continuously from one planet to the other, chanting praises to Bhagavān Vishnu. Sometime later, pride entered his heart and he came to think of himself as the greatest Bhakta of Vishnu. To confirm that his self-impression was true, he went to Krishna and asked Him, “Bhagavān, who do You consider to be Your best devotee on this earth?”

Krishna replied, “This question is really difficult to answer. But let me take you to the home of the farmer in Hemakūta. I think him to be My greatest devotee.” Krishna and Nārada changed their appearances and arrived at the farmer’s doorstep. The sun was setting, and the farmer’s wife had just served her husband and their two kids some food. Seeing strangers at his doorstep, the tired and exhausted farmer invited them inside and asked them if they needed anything. The visitors asked for some food.

The only food available was what the farmer’s wife had cooked. So the farmer gave his food to the stranger. The wife, seeing that their two visitors were still hungry, gave her food to them as well. The visitors further said that they were tired and wanted to sleep after dinner. As the farmer’s hut was very small, the couple and their kids went outside the hut to sleep and kindly gave their small hut to the visitors to sleep.

Next morning, the farmer and his wife prepared some more food and served as breakfast to the visitors. Krishna (in disguise) then said that he wanted to go to the farmer’s field. So the farmer asked them to accompany him. There in the field, the farmer set to tilling the land laboriously with his bullock, explaining to Krishna and Nārada (in disguise) the tiring work of agriculture. After a few hours, when it was time for rest, Krishna asked the farmer, “You keep so busy all the time. You work in the fields all day. Then you go home, feed your buffalo. Your wife prepares meager food from the very little income you have. You eat it with your family, play a bit with your kids, ask about their school and then go to bed – completely exhausted. Do you ever get time to remember Bhagavān?”

The farmer replied, “I am a humble poor farmer that must work and work to feed my family and my buffalo.



But three times in the day, I get a chance to remember Bhagavān. When I leave home and walk towards the field in the morning, when I walk back towards my home at sunset, and just when I am about to sleep in the night.”

Nārada snickered when he heard that and thought to himself, “Ahh, he remembers Bhagavān only thrice. I remember Him thousands of time throughout the day. Perhaps Krishna has now understood that not this farmer, but I am the greater devotee.” Krishna read the mind of Nārada and decided to teach him a lesson.

When the two visitors were about to leave, the poor farmer gave them a pitcher of oil as a gift, saying, “This oil is extracted from the mustard seeds that I cultivate. I’d be grateful if you’d accept it as a gift.” The visitors were charmed by the poor farmer’s generosity and left.

After they had gone some distance, Krishna suddenly said, “Nārada, I want you to place this pitcher of oil on your head, and walk carefully so that not a single drop spills out.” Nārada agreed. It was

really tough for him, and he was nervous all the time. After an hour, Krishna asked him, “So how many times did you remember me Nārada, while you carried that oil pitcher on your head?” Nārada replied, “I was so nervous about spilling it that I did not dare to remember you even once.”

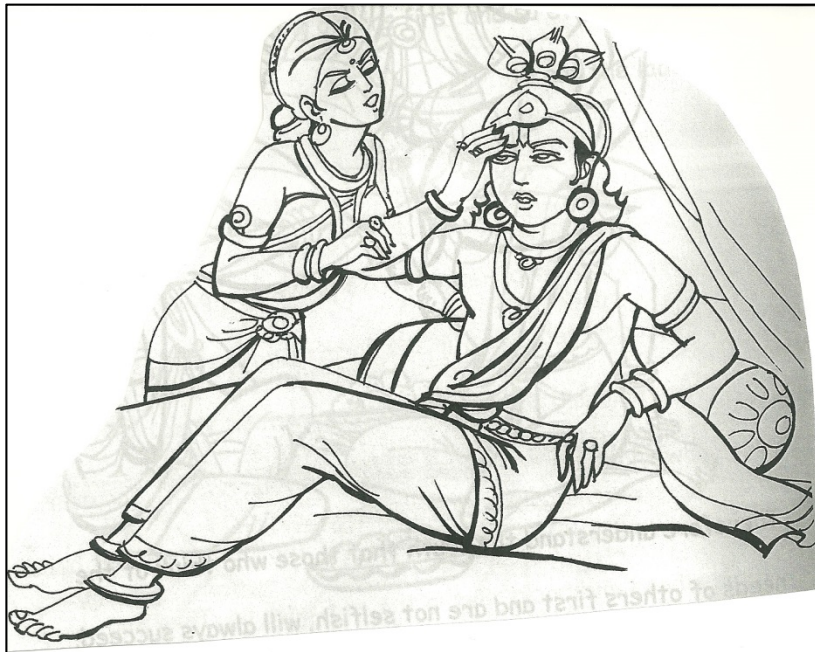
Krishna smiled and said, “Look at that humble farmer Nārada. His life is so hard. He works the entire day for a meager income. He has the heavy responsibility of his family on his head, heavier than this oil pitcher. Yet, he continues to work day after day. And what is so praiseworthy, he has no pride in his heart, and he takes my name with devotion three times in the day. Do you think your life is tougher than him? Do you think he becomes inferior to you just because he does not remember me thousands of times in the day like you – you who are a wandering Rishi who does not have any responsibilities in life?”

Sage Nārada was humbled. He realized that the farmer performed his duties with devotion and without getting annoyed with his tough life. And yet, even though he remembered Bhagavān only three times in the entire day, the fact was that every action of that farmer was actually an act of worship. The triple prayer of the farmer was merely a formality to dedicate his day’s entire worth of good Karma to Vishnu! And nothing is more precious to Vishnu that we work hard, and then offer all of our good karma and its fruit to Vishnu.

Class Discussion: Just like the farmer, your own parents also work very hard throughout the day. Can you list ten things that they do in the day, and two things that they do for you every day? Don’t you think that Bhagavān is pleased with them because they work so hard to take care of you? So will you too always talk to them in a happy mood?

Story: The best medicine to cure Krishna’s headache

Once Sage Nārada went to Krishna and complained, “You always keep praising the love and devotion of the illiterate milk-maids (Gopīs) of Vrindāvana. Your wives are very upset because you seem to like the Gopīs more than them. What is so special about the devotion of the Gopīs?”



Krishna said he will answer this question later because he had a headache. When Nārada offered to get some medicine to cure the headache, Krishna refused, saying, “Only the dust from the feet of my devotee can cure my headache.”

Nārada went to Krishna’s wives, friends and relatives one by one but they all refused to give the dust from their feet saying, “If we give the dust of our feet to our Lord for his head, we will go to hell. How can we be so disrespectful towards our Lord?”

Nārada went to every place in the universe and asked every devotee if they could give the dust of their feet to apply to the forehead of the Lord. But they all refused for the same reason

that they cannot insult Krishna and go to hell. Disappointed, Nārada returned to Krishna and told him that no one in the universe wanted to give the dust of his or her feet to cure Krishna’s headache. Krishna asked, “But Nārada, did you go and ask the Gopīs of Vrindāvana for the dust of their feet?”

Nārada laughed and said, “Surely you must be joking Bhagavān! What can the dust from the feet of those illiterate and uncouth rural women tending cattle do to get rid of your headache. But if you insist, let me go there too.”

At Vrindāvana, the Gopīs welcomed the sage and eagerly asked him if he had met Krishna, and how He was doing. Nārada told them that Krishna was doing fine except that he had an excruciating headache. The Gopīs was

saddened, and asked, “Don’t you have good physicians in Dwārakā for prescribing some medicine to cure the headache?” Nārada said, “Nothing will work. Krishna thinks that only the dust of the feet of his devotees will cure his headache.”



As soon as the Gopīs heard this, one of them placed her most expensive shawl on the ground. All of them started stomping their feet on the clay on the ground and then they dusted off their feet on the shawl. The Gopīs then tied the shawl filled with dust into a

bundle and presented it to Nārada.

Nārada was aghast. He scolded the Gopīs and said, “How ill-mannered and disrespectful can you be towards Krishna! You claim to be His servants, His devotees, and yet you do not think twice before throwing the dust of your feet on his head! Don’t you know that you will invite His anger with your actions? You will all go to hell for disrespecting Krishna!”

The Gopīs said, “We do not mind going to hell, nor do we mind facing his anger. All we want is that Krishna’s headache should go away and that He feels fine again. So please do not wait here. Hurry! Take this dust to our Lord immediately. For His comfort, we do not mind suffering endlessly.”

Nārada’s was overwhelmed with the reply of Gopīs. Now he understood why Krishna constantly praised their devotion. The love and devotion of Gopīs, unlike that of others, was completely unselfish and undemanding. The Gopīs did not care for their own welfare. All they wanted was that their Lord should be happy, even if it meant great pain to themselves.



Class Discussion: Tell us of a time when you helped someone not to impress him or to feel proud, but just because that other person needed help.

1.7 Rishi Dadhīchi and his son Rishi Pippalāda

Story: Rishi Dadhīchi Forgives Indra and helps him

Ashvinī Kumāras, the twin brothers, were unique Devatīs because they had the knowledge of reviving dead people back to life. Indra thought, “My advantage over them is that I have spiritual wisdom, which they do not possess. But if they acquire that spiritual knowledge too, then they might threaten me and become the Kings of the Devatīs in my place.” Therefore out of fear and jealousy, Indra ordered that if anyone teaches spiritual wisdom to the Ashvinī Kumāras, that teacher’s head would split into a thousand pieces.

The Ashvinī Kumāras were upset when they heard of Indra’s decree. They went to a very pious Rishi Dadhīchi and requested, “O Rishi, no one dares to teach us the spiritual wisdom of the Vedic scriptures. Therefore, we are requesting you to stand up to Indra. We will replace your head with that of a horse, and when that horse head splits, we will replace it again with your original head.” Out of kindness, Rishi Dadhīchi agreed, and taught the spiritual



wisdom to the twin brothers. As soon as he had done so, Indra hurled an axe and beheaded the Rishi. The Kumāras then re-grafted the head of the Rishi back to his torso when the horse head had broken into pieces. Rishi Dadhichi regained his life and his original form.

Several years later, an evil demon named Vritra grew very powerful and he began to trouble all the residents of heaven. Finally, he even invaded heaven and drove out Indra. Homeless, Indra appealed to Bhagavān Vishnu to help him. But Vishnu replied, “Vritra can be killed only with a weapon made from the bones of a Rishi who has meditated a long time, who is pure and therefore whose bones have become charged with spiritual power. At this time, Dadhichi is the only Rishi whose bones can give a strong enough weapon.”

Indra became very nervous now, because he had earlier beheaded Dadhichi. But nevertheless, he went to Rishi Dadhichi and begged for forgiveness and told him the reason for his visit. Rishi Dadhichi smiled and said, “Aren’t you the same person who

had tried to kill me earlier? But it is the duty of Rishis to forgive and forget. And even more important, if I do not forgive you and do not give you my bones, then because of your past actions, many innocent Devatās and other creatures will suffer. Therefore, I will forgive you and permit you to take my bones.”

Rishi Dadhichi then sat in meditation, till his soul left his body and merged with Bhagavān Vishnu. Indra then used the weapon crafted from his bones, and was able to defeat Vritra in a battle. The story of Dadhichi shows how we should forget old rivalries and enmities and should be willing to sacrifice ourselves when our society and when our loved ones are faced with a great danger.



Story: Rishi Pippalāda realizes that a portion of the Devatās lives inside all of us



Rishi Dadhichi gave up his body so that his bones could be used by Indra to make Vajra, a strong weapon, for killing evil Vritra. When the Rishi’s son, Pippalāda grew older, he was full of resentment for the fact that his father had to die for the sake of Indra. He blamed Indra and his Devatas for the death of his father, and all the suffering he had to undergo in his childhood due to the loss of his parent. He thought that the Devas were indeed selfish and depraved people because they asked for his father’s bones to suit their own selfish motives.

He decided to teach the Devatās a lesson. He meditated for long to please Shiva, Who finally appeared in before him and offered him a boon. Pippalāda asked, “May the Devas burn to death!” Bhagavān Shiva asked him to choose another boon, but the Rishi’s son would not agree. Therefore Shiva finally said, “So be it. Let the Devas start burning!”

But the moment Shiva said this, Pippalāda started feeling a strong burning sensation in his own body, from head to toe. He cried to Shiva, “What have you done Bhagavān? I had asked you to burn the Devas but you are burning me instead!”

Bhagavān Shiva replied, “The Devas are not just outside of us. A portion of the Devas dwells inside all the creatures as well. Therefore, if you burn the Devas, you cannot escape their fate too. Your father was a great Rishi. No one forced him to die. All human beings have to die one day. But your father chose a very noble death, so that all the Devas and all the creatures may live. He made a great sacrifice for the sake of this creation. Do not insult his sacrifice by bearing a grudge against the Devas.”

Pippalāda understood the greatness of his father through the words of Shiva, and he asked Bhagavān for forgiveness. In fact, he himself became a great Rishi and became one of the compilers of the Atharvaveda, which is one of the four divinely revealed books of the Hindus.

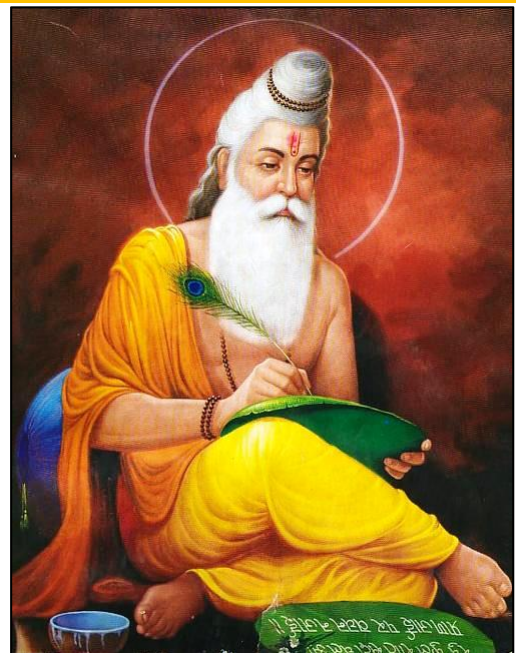
Class Discussion: This story shows that a part of the Devatās lives inside all of us. Does this not mean that we should take care of ourselves, and not insult the Devas by doing bad things with our body? Does this not mean that when you hurt others physically, you also hurt the Devas in them? Can you list five (5) bad things that you can do with or to your body to insult the Devas within you.

1.8 Maharshi Vālmīki – the Author of Ramayana

Rishi Valmiki is called the ‘Ādi Kavi’ or the first poet in the Sanskrit language. He wrote the Ramayana, the story of the life of Lord Rama in 24,000 verses. The Ramayana has become so popular that even outside India, people in many countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Malaysia, China, and Japan have their own versions of Ramayana based on Rishi Valmiki’s original version.

Thousands of years ago, a dacoit named Ratnākara (also called Valya Koli) lived in the forests of north India. He earned his living by robbing and killing travelers who were passing through the forest. He would steal their belongings and food, and take them home to feed his own children and wife.

One day, Sage Nārada was passing through the forest. Suddenly, Valya came from behind a bush and threatened to kill Nārada unless he gave up his belongings. Nārada asked Valya as to why he lived this life of robbing and killing. “To feed my family,” replied Valya. Nārada then asked him, “Don’t you know it is a bad crime to kill and steal from others? You will get bad Karma (i.e. fruit

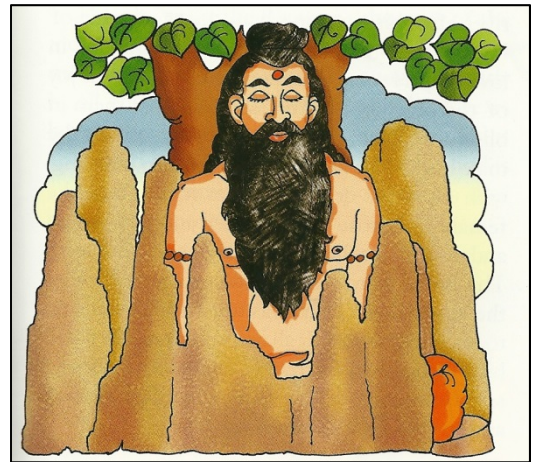


of action), and suffer punishment for it later. Will your family also share your bad Karma with you just like you share your loot with them?”

“Of course, I will go and ask them and confirm it for you.” said Valya. But when Valya asked his wife and children if they will also share his bad Karma, they refused. They all said, “It is your duty to take care of us and feed us. This does not mean that we should also share your bad Karma with you.” Now Valya was very sad, because the family whom he loved and for whom he did all the crimes was unwilling to share his bad deeds too. He realized that we all pay alone for our evil deeds, and earn good fruit alone for our good deeds. Valya then decided to mend his ways

and become a good person.

So he rushed back to Nārada to tell him how sorry he was for all that he had done so far. “How can I make good my bad deeds and become a good person?” Sage Nārada asked him to sit in meditation, and continuously chant the name of Rama till he returned. So Sage Valya sat at one place, and chanted ‘Rama-Rama’ without moving for many years till termite ants made an ant-hill (called ‘Vālmīki’) and completely covered his body. And therefore, he came to be known as Vālmīki. Finally, a Divine voice from heaven said that Īshvara is pleased with the devotion of Vālmīki and he can come out of the ant-hill. Rishi Nārada appeared and told Vālmīki that now he was a reformed person. He narrated to him briefly the life-story of Rama, who was then the King of Ayodhyā.



In the course of time, Vālmīki became a Saint and a great poet. He composed the Ramayana, the story of the beautiful character of Lord Rama. His first students were none other than Luv and Kush, the twin sons of Bhagavān Rama himself. When the two princes sang the Ramayana in front of Rama, he was greatly overjoyed. Rama confirmed that everything that is written in the Ramayana about his life is true.



The Ramayana written by him became famous all over the world. Even today, millions of people read the Ramayana and learn from the good virtues and deeds of Rama so that they can themselves lead better lives.

The life of Sage Vālmīki shows that even an evil person can become a Saint if he starts worshipping Īshvara with full devotion and faith, and gives up bad deeds. If we want to give up bad habits, we should keep trying really hard and also ask Īshvara to help us. In the course of time, Īshvara will have mercy on us and He will help us become virtuous.

We can also worship Bhagavān by reading the Ramayana of Valmiki. In this holy book, we read about the good character of Lord Rama – how he always listened to his parents, spoke gently to everyone, took care of all, and was loyal to his friends and so on.

Reading the Ramayana will influence us to become a good person like Rama. Vālmīki was a robber and yet he became a Rishi and a Saint by giving up his bad habits, and by worshipping Īshvara. Similarly, if we have any bad habits, we should try to leave them, and worship Bhagavān continuously to help us become good.

1.9 Shabari, the student of Rishi Mātanga

Bhagavān Rama and his brother Lakshmana were travelling through the forests of Southern India in search of Devi Sītā, the wife of Lord Rama, who had been kidnapped. They happened to pass by the Āshrama (hermitage) of Rishi Mātanga. In that hermitage, lived a humble, unintelligent and illiterate tribal woman named Shabari. Everyone thought that she was foolish, and they made fun of her because she was ugly and simple minded. But Shabari always did her work diligently in the Āshrama, served her Guru and remembered Bhagavān in her heart. On his death bed, the Rishi told Shabari that her devotion will be rewarded and Rama would come Himself to her.

Many years later, when she heard that the Rama was coming in the direction of the Āshrama, her joy knew no bounds! She wanted to feed the most delicious fruit and berries to Bhagavān Rama to satisfy his hunger. So she went around from one bush of berries to another, plucking berries in a plate. She chewed one-half of each berry. Whenever she tasted a delicious and sweet berry, she would store the non-chewed half of that berry in a bowl. When she came across a bitter one, she would throw the whole berry away.

When the Rama arrived, she offered Him a seat, and water, and then gave him the bowl of half-chewed sweet berries. In her excitement, she had forgotten that we must never give dirty food to our guests. Lakshmana felt disgusted that Shabari should have offered her half-chewed berries to Rama. But the Bhagavān was so touched by the simple devotion and love of the tribal woman that he ate the berries offered by her with great delight.



After He had finished the berries, Shabari folded her hands in Namaste, and asked the Rama with great devotion – “O Lord! I do not know the correct way of worshipping you because I am a very lowly, ugly, and illiterate woman born in a very degraded tribe. On top of that, I am not very intelligent or wise. Please tell me how I should worship you, and forgive me if I have offended you in any way.”

Lord Rama replied –

“O beautiful lady! Listen to me. One should give up all pride due to one’s wealth, strength, good qualities, intelligence or due to belonging to good families or caste. Instead of seeking for praise others, we should simply serve Bhagavān through our Bhakti, and should praise Him alone. A person who lacks Bhakti and faith is like that useless cloud that soars high up in the sky but does not shower any life giving rain. Now I shall explain to you the nine paths of Bhakti. Pay attention and listen to what I say.

First, seek always the company of saintly and virtuous people.

Second, instead of paying attention to useless talk, spend your time in listening to the biographies of Avatāras and Saints.

Third, serve your Guru with humility.

Fourth, give up all crookedness of heart, and sing the praises of the great qualities of God.

Fifth, chant the holy Vedas and recite the sacred mantras, sing bhajans and pray whenever you can.

Sixth, follow what the good people do, keep your senses under control, and do a lot of good deeds.

Seventh, treat everyone equally and see Me in everyone.

Eighth, do not be greedy and be satisfied with what you get as a result of your labor. Also, do not see faults in others even in your dream, but always see their good qualities and encourage them.

Ninth, be straightforward, do not show any cunningness, and have faith in Me alone with all your heart.

Rare is that man or woman in which you can see even one of these nine types of devotion. Dear Shabari, everyone makes fun of you. But I can see that in reality, you are the most beautiful woman because all these nine forms of devotion are practiced by you with great humility. Today, I will give you that reward that even Yogis and Saints do not get easily. I shall reveal my Divine form to you.”

And then Lord Rama showed his form as Lord Vishnu to her. Shabari’s soul then left her body, and merged with Lord Rama. She attained Moksha as a result of her simplicity and simple devotion towards the Lord.

1.10 Rishi Ashtāvakra

Rishi Kahor was a famous scholar of the Vedas. One day, he was chanting the Vedas in the presence of his pregnant wife Sujātā. Suddenly, the fetus spoke from inside his mother’s womb, “Father, you are not chanting the Vedas correctly.” Kahor’s ego was hurt, and he cursed his own son, “You are a mere unborn infant. How dare you correct me! I curse you that you will be reborn with eight bends in your body.”

Before the baby was born, Kahor heard that King Janaka had organized a grand yajna for which he was looking for suitable priests. Kahor reached the palace of Janaka and offered to help out. But the king placed a pre-condition before he would hire the services of Kahor, "I am interested only in a priest who is a greater scholar than my own court scholar Vandī. If you defeat him in a scholarly debate on the Vedas, you will be hired. If you are defeated, you must drown yourself to death." Kahor was confident of his knowledge and accepted the challenge. Unfortunately, he lost, and had to drown himself!



Sometime later, Sujātā gave birth to a baby. Due to his father's curse, the baby had eight bends in his body. Therefore, he was named as Ashtāvakra, or 'one with eight bends'. Despite his physical deformity and ugliness, Ashtāvakra became a great scholar of Hindu scriptures as a child. When he was twelve years of age, his uncle told him how his father Kahor had died because he had lost the debate with Vandī.

Ashtāvakra decided to avenge his father's death. He travelled to Janaka's court after impressing the guards of his knowledge. But when he entered the court, the courtiers and scholars present there started laughing at his deformed appearance.

Once the laughter ended, Ashtāvakra said, "I had come here to meet scholars, but it appears that the assembly of King Janaka comprises not of scholars but cobblers." The King and his courtiers and scholars were stunned at Ashtāvakra's rebuke. But the child continued, "A scholar is he who looks beyond the body, which is nothing but a bag of leather we call the skin, and which encloses bones, blood etc. within it. The scholar knows

that this bag of leather is temporary and perishable. Only the soul within it is real and survives death. But your so called scholars looked only at my body, and laughed. They had no idea of my soul which makes my body alive."



King Janaka was very impressed by the wisdom of Ashtāvakra. But the boy then asked to debate with Vandī, with the same wager – if Vandī lost, he would drown himself to death. If Ashtāvakra lost, he would do the same. The debate resulted in Vandī's defeat. But he would not drown himself, and instead said, "I am a messenger of Varuṇa, the Devata of water. I cannot be drowned. Your father was not the only scholar who drowned himself to death. There were many others who lost the debate with me and suffered the same fate. And the truth behind this is that these scholars are not dead. They were needed by my father for the performance of a Yajna. There were therefore immediately taken to realm of Varuṇa after they drowned. Now, that the Yajna is completed, and they can all return."

As Vandī said these words, all the Rishis appeared from the water and walked on the river bank. Among them was Kahor, the father of Ashtāvakra. Kahor blessed his son for his devotion and asked him to take a dip in the river. When Ashtāvakra emerged from the water, his bends in the body had all disappeared and he had a normal physique like everyone else.

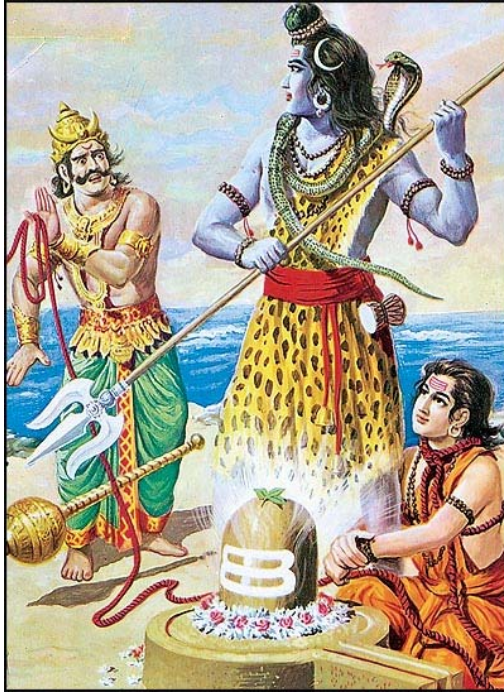
From this story, we learn that we should not judge a person based on his appearance. After all, the body is really like a leather bag inside which are contained bones, muscles, blood, and other organs. A wise person knows that

it is not the body, but the mind and the soul inside the body that are important. A person becomes great or low not by how his body looks like, but whether his mind and soul are pure or not.

The teachings of Ashtāvakra given in the court of King Janaka are collected in a scripture called the Ashtāvakra Samhitā. The story is contained in the Mahābhārata and in other scriptures.

1.11 Rishi Markaṇḍeya becomes Immortal with the blessing of Shiva

Long, long ago, there lived a Sage named Mrikaṇḍu and his wife Marudvati. They had no children and so, they prayed to Shiva to grant them a child. Bhagavān Shiva was pleased with their devotion. He appeared to the couple and asked them to choose between a son who would be very Dharmic and would be devoted to Shiva but would live for just 16 years; or a hundred sons who will be foolish but will all live long lives. Since Sage Mrikaṇḍu and Marudvati were very virtuous couple, they asked for the first son who will be wise, and devoted to Bhagavān even if he were to live for only 16 years.



Soon thereafter, a son was born to the couple, and they named him Markaṇḍeya. Just as Bhagavān Shiva had promised, Markaṇḍeya grew up to be a very wise and Dharmic boy. However, as he got closer to sixteen years of age, he started noticing that his parents became sadder and sadder. He asked them for the cause of their sadness. When he learned that he will die soon, he said – “Do not worry. I will worship Bhagavān Shiva to extend my life, because he answers the prayers of his true devotees.”

As he approached his sixteenth birthday, Markaṇḍeya started worshipping Shiva in the form of a Shivalinga. On his 16th birthday, Yamarāja, the Lord of Death appeared and started to pull Markaṇḍeya’s soul out of his body. But Markaṇḍeya did not get scared and continued to worship Bhagavān Shiva. He grabbed the Shivalinga. Bhagavān Shiva appeared from the Shivalinga and when he saw that Yamarāja was ending the life of his devotee, he appeared in front of them and scared Yamarāja away. He scolded Yamarāja and asked him to never harm his devotees.

Then, he blessed Markaṇḍeya with an eternal life, and told him that he will never die. Markaṇḍeya grew to become a great Rishi, and one of the eighteen major Purāṇas is named after him. Devout Hindus believe that Markaṇḍeya still lives on, invisible to us. The prayer with which Markaṇḍeya worshipped Lord Shiva is the Mahāmṛityunjaya Mantra (‘The Great Mantra of victory over death’) which goes as under –

Om! Tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam |
Urvaarukamiva bandhanaat mṛityurmukshiiya maamritaam || Yajurveda (Mādhyandina) 3.60

“We worship the three eyed One (Lord Shiva, Who can see the past/present/future) Who is fragrant (i.e., Whose glory is spread far and wide) and Who nourishes all creatures. May He free us from death and lead us to immortality, just as a melon detaches from its creeper branch on its own upon ripening.”

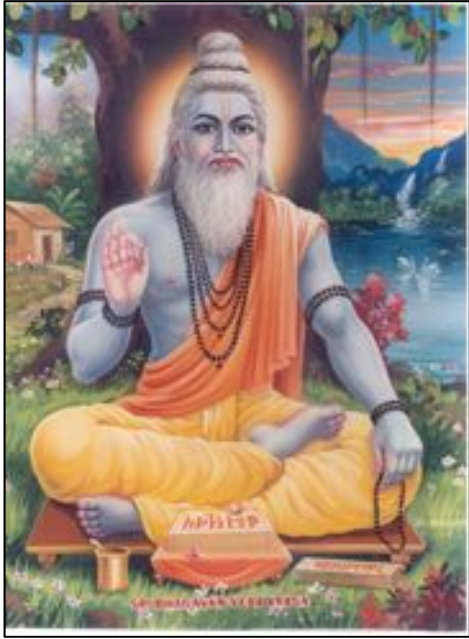
When someone is very sick or has just died, this Mantra is recited for his benefit at least eleven times

1.12 Rishi Veda Vyāsa

The Festival of Guru Pūrṇimā: Birthday of Veda Vyāsa, The Greatest Guru after Bhagavān

The full-moon night in the month of Ashāḍha in the Hindu calendar, is celebrated as the birthday of Sage Veda Vyāsa. Therefore, this day is called Vyāsa Pūrṇimā, where the word Pūrṇimā means ‘full-moon night’. Since Veda Vyāsa was an excellent teacher (=Guru), his birthday is also celebrated as ‘Guru Pūrṇimā’ or the Teacher’s Full-Moon Night, and traditional Hindus honor their teachers this day every year.

Rishi Veda Vyāsa was born to a fisherwoman named Satyavatī and Rishi Parāshara. He was very short and dark and is said to have also been very ugly. But despite his looks, and his birth from a fisherwoman, he became the



greatest Rishi of Hindu Dharma. The life of Rishi Veda Vyāsa teaches us that no matter who our parents are, and no matter how our looks are, we can become great through our dedication to studies and hard work. We should also try to stop violence and injustice wherever we can.

He re-edited the Vedas because they were very large in size and people found them difficult to master. Therefore, he divided them into four shorter books that we have today. In addition, he wrote the Mahābhārata and the 18 Purāṇas which together have 500,000 verses. He wrote many other holy books of the Hindus and taught all of them to his many students. His students taught their own students, and therefore these books are being studied even today, after several thousand years. In this way, Vyāsa was an ideal teacher because he wrote many books, and taught them well to many students. If Vyāsa had not lived, Hindu Dharma might have been very different today.

Several major traditions in Hindu Dharma claim that they were started by Veda Vyāsa. Today, his birthday is celebrated as the festival of Guru Pūrṇimā. On this day, we honor our Gurus by offering them gifts and worshipping them. A popular stotra that is chanted on this day is the Guru Stotram. Therefore, it is like the ‘Teacher’s Day’ on a day when we

have a full moon (a full moon night is called Pūrṇimā).

The following are the traditional verses that are chanted in the honor of this great Rishi:

OM! Salutations to Veda Vyasa, the descendent of Vashishtha Muni
And the sinless grandson of Shakti.
Salutations to the son of Parāshara, to the father of Shukadeva,
To him who is an repository of spiritual austerities ||
Salutations to Vyasa, an incarnation of Vishnu.
Salutations to Vishnu in the form of Vyasa!
Salutations to him who is a repository of Brahman and the Vedic lore
Repeated prostrations to the descendant of Sage Vashishtha ||
Salutations to Vyasa, who is Brahma without the four heads
Who is Vishnu without the four arms, Who is Shiva without the third eye.
Prostrations to Bhagavān Bādarāyaṇa, the teacher of Vedānta ||
[Traditional verses in praise of Veda Vyasa, loosely translated]

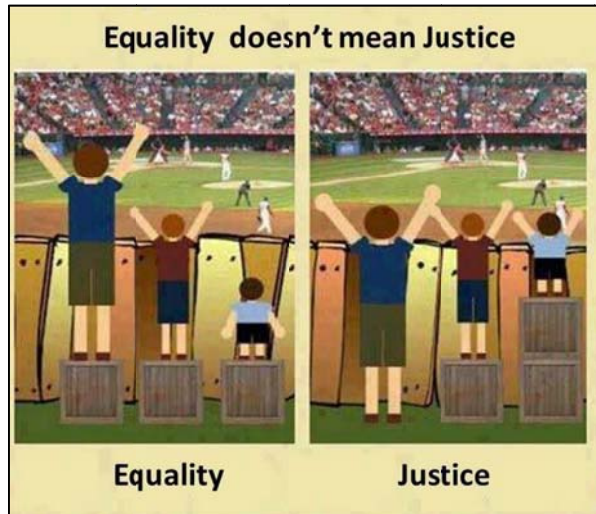
Veda Vyāsa had four children. The first were a set of three brothers – Dhritarāshtra, Pāṇdu and Vidura. The fourth was Shukadeva. The story of the first three brothers is found in the Mahābhārata whereas Shukadeva is an important character in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which is another very important holy book. There was great enmity between the evil sons of Dhritarāshtra, who were called the Kauravas, and the sons of Pāṇdu, who were called the Pāṇdavas. Many a times, Veda Vyāsa stopped violence and killing and also tried to prevent injustice.

Let us read of a story that Veda Vyāsa said to King Dhritarāshtra after the Kauravas cheated the Pāṇdavas and robbed them of their kingdom. The Pāṇdavas had to leave their home and live in great difficulty in the forest for several years. Right after the Pāṇdavas had left, Veda Vyāsa arrived at the palace of King Dhritarāshtra and said the following story to him:

“Long ago, Surabhi who is the Mother of all cows and bulls on this earth, went to Indra in heaven. She wept in front of Indra saying, “King of Devas, look at that weak bull, my son below on the earth. He is pulling a plough with another son of mine, a stronger bull. A farmer is beating him with a stick, and twisting his tail because he is too weak to pull it along with my stronger son.” Indra said, “There are thousands of sons of yours who are pulling carts and ploughs for different people on the earth. Then why do you cry only for that weak son?” The Mother Cow Surabhi replied, “My Lord, I know that my stronger sons will be able to do their work without any pain. They can take care of

themselves. You are correct that they are all my own children. But the heart of the mother always weeps, and gets filled with love for her weakest children. And this is the reason why I cry for that weak bull.”

Rishi Veda Vyasa then said to Dhritarāshtra, “King, Mother Surabhi had a special love for that weak bull, even though all the cows and bulls on this earth are her children. After King Pandu died, you are father not only of the Kauravas, but also of the Pāṇḍavas. The Kauravas are one hundred, the Pāṇḍavas were only five in number. The Kauravas were already enjoying living in the Kingdom since their birth, whereas the Pāṇḍavas suffered a lot in their childhood. Even now, because of your partiality, the Pāṇḍavas are roaming like beggars in a forest. Their clothes are



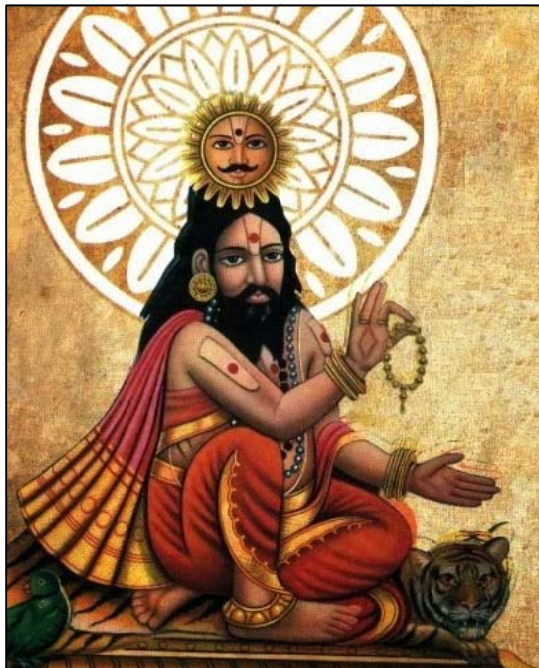
torn, and they have barely enough to eat. And yet, you still love only the powerful and rich Kauravas as your sons. Why does not your heart melt at the suffering of the Pāṇḍavas? Don't you have any compassion in your heart? Where is your sense of justice?”

Veda Vyāsa then said to King Dhritarāshtra, “King, I can understand your love for your son. But remember that Dharma is supreme. You must stop him from doing evil Karma. And after all, the Pāṇḍavas are also your own family. Then why are you allowing Duryodhana to harm them?”

Class Discussion: In the light of Veda Vyāsa's story, what message can you draw from the picture on the left? Do you feel upset or jealous when your parents show extra love for your younger sister or brother?

1.13 Rishi Yajnavalkya and Rishikās Gārgī and Maitreyī

Maharshi Yajnavalkya was born in the town of Chamatkrapur in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. He

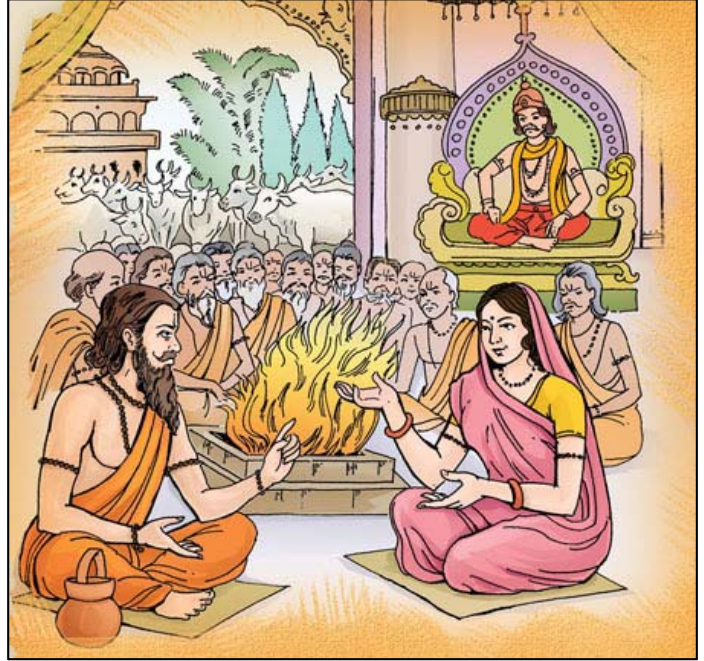


learned all the four Vedas from different Rishis. Due to some misunderstanding, his Yajurveda teacher Rishi Charaka Vaishampāyana asked Yajnavalkya to return the Yajurveda, and teach it to another student named Tittiri. The 'returned' Taittiriya Yajurveda is today widely prevalent in peninsular India, and contains the famous 'Taittiriya Upanishad' within it.

Subsequent to this incident, Yajnavalkya meditated upon Sūrya (the Divine as a Solar Deity) to learn another version of the Yajurveda. It is said that Sūrya appeared in the form of a horse ('vaji') and taught a different version of Yajurveda to Yajnavalkya, which then came to be known as Vajasneya or Shukla Yajurveda. This new form of Yajurveda is highly systematic and thorough in its description of Vedic ceremonies. But the greatest claim to fame of Shukla Yajurveda is its inclusion of two of the greatest scriptures of Hindu spirituality, namely Ishavasya Upanishad, and the

giant Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The latter especially contains Yajnavalkya's spiritual discussions with his spouse Maitreyi, with King Janaka and with various other scholars.

In these discussions, Yajnavalkya comes across as an extremely eloquent and a spiritual person who responds to every question on the nature of the world, the secret of Vedic ceremonies, the nature of the jīva (individual soul) and the Supreme Being (Brahman) in a very systematic and detailed way. He also establishes the Sannyāsa (asceticism) as an institution within the Vedic Hindu Dharma. He is also very blunt when it comes to exposing priestly pretensions, pedantry and hypocrisy. Many of these discussions occurred at the court of King Janaka, the extremely generous/liberal and learned philosopher King who ruled Mithila, a kingdom in Nepal and the Indian state of Bihar. In one such spiritual conference, King Janaka offered 1000 cows with horns covered with gold to the greatest knower of the Supreme Being. Yajnavalkya called the bluff by asking his students to herd the cattle to his Ashrama (hermitage). The shocked scholars ganged up and challenged him to prove his scholarship before daring to claim the prize. Yajnavalkya responded ably to all of their questions and the debate becomes progressively heated.



Suddenly, a woman scholar Gargi mediates and says, “I will ask two questions to Yajnavalkya. If he responds to them correctly, we must all collectively accept defeat.” All the other scholars in Janaka’s court accept her proposal. She asks the questions, and is humbled by Yajnavalkya’s erudition and understanding. What stands out in this entire episode is the fact that all the scholars in the assembly were open to a woman representing them to present the wager to Yajnavalkya. This shows that in ancient India, women could be distinguished scholars of religion and spirituality not merely in private but also as public leaders. We can summarize the answers of Yajnavalkya to other scholars in the following words:

1. There is only one Supreme Being who manifests in many different ways. He controls this entire creation not from outside, but from within it. He abides within all of us, but unfortunately, we do not seek to know Him. Hear about Him from a competent Guru, then reflect about Him, and

finally meditate upon Him. But before you embark on your spiritual journey, acquire the pre-requisites of detachment towards worldly pleasures, the ability to discriminate the eternal from the non-eternal, equanimity, faith, self-control and the like. Overcome the desire for procuring wealth, progeny and fame.

2. A person becomes good through good karma, and bad through bad karma. Our desires lead to resolves, which lead to Karma. And our karma has good and bad results. But no matter how much good karma we do, their fruit eventually comes to an end. Therefore, he is unfortunate indeed who leaves this world without seeking to know the Supreme Being.

3. The Supreme Atman (Soul) cannot be destroyed, it was never born because it is eternal. It cannot be described completely and adequately, because it is different from everything that we perceive through our senses. It is full of Bliss. A person who experiences this Atman behaves like an innocent child who is free of guile, jealousy, enmity. And yet, he is full of inner joy, and free of worries and negative emotions.

In his old age, Yajnavalkya decided to become an ascetic and started dividing his property between his two wives – Maitreyi and Katyayani. But the former asked him, “Will this wealth make me immortal?” He



replied, “No one can hope for immortality through wealth. It will merely make your life a rich person’s life.” Maitreyi responded, “Then of what use is your wealth to me? Give me the knowledge that will take me to immortality.” Yajnavalkya is very pleased, and he gives her a very detailed discourse on the true basis of love, which is the realization that we all have an underlying unity in the Supreme Being, who abides within all of us, and unites us like a string unites several beads and gems into a single necklace. As long as we

consider ourselves separate from others, ignoring this underlying unity, we can always rationalize not loving them, be they our spouse, parents, children or friends. We must love each other for His sake and for our own sake. When we love or hate others, we in fact love or hate ourselves due to this underlying unity. Therefore, the true basis of love is realizing that we are not really different and separate from each other. It is through knowing this immanent Brahman that we become eternal, joyous and transcend death, sorrow and ignorance.

This particular episode shows how Hindu Dharma acknowledges women as valid recipients and students of the greatest truths of our faith. India has honored the memory of Gargi and Maitreyi by naming colleges after them in Delhi and in other places.

In Jabala Upanishad, Rishi Yajnavalkya allows the right to become an ascetic to even a young student, provided he has no attachment towards worldly matters. He is also credited with the compilation of a code of Dharma (Yajnavalkya Smriti), which is marked by a very skillful construction of verses. In this work, the

Rishi notes that noble intent is also a valid source of Dharma (somewhat parallel to the 'Good Samaritan Law' in many societies). He also defends the right of a sonless widow to inherit her deceased husband's property.

Rishi Yajnavalkya is known as Yogeeshvara (the Lord of Yogis) in the Hindu tradition. His work on Yoga exists even today in at least three different versions. It consists of the Rishi's instructions on Yoga to Gargi, which demonstrates that ancient Hinduism allowed women to practice this spiritual discipline.

Yajnavalkya's teachings form the bedrock of Hindu spirituality. In fact, he was one of those Rishis who placed spirituality at the very core of Hindu Dharma. His own life and teachings demonstrate that spiritual values are the source of religious/ethical norms, and the former are therefore more important than the latter.

Once, there was a conference in the court of King Janaka in which many Rishis gathered to debate about the nature of Bhagavān. It appeared that Rishi Yājñavalkya was going to win the debate. But the other scholars who were present there were not happy that they were going to lose. Therefore, they appointed a Rishikā to lead their side. Her name was Gārgī. Later in his life, when Yājñavalkya decided to spend his complete time to meditate on Bhagavān, he gave his best teachings to his wife named Maitreyī.



unites us into one single universe. Therefore, we are all a part of each other. We are all related to each other through Bhagavān. For this reason, we should love others as we love ourselves. And when we hate others, we only hate ourselves, because everyone related to us through Bhagavān.

These examples show that in the ancient Hindu society, Rishikās and other women too could become scholars and challenge Rishis to debate them, or learn from them. Today, India has honored Gārgī and Maitreyī by naming colleges after them.

Class Exercise: Mark the location of the Rishis and Rishikās in the map and place them on the timeline at the end of the book.

1.14 Rishi Āruṇī:

Āruṇī was the son of Rishi Aruni. As per the tradition of the time, though Rishi Aruni was learned, he sent his son to study with another learned Rishi named Dhaumya. Āruṇī knew the secret of gaining the knowledge as he was the son of a Rishi. He knew that service of the Guru is the key, as it trains our minds and makes them more receptive.



His teacher gave him a job of taking care of a small farm in the outskirts of the town. The farm was on a small hill. In the rainy season, Āruṇī noticed water flowing down the hill and his crop was not getting enough water. So he told his teacher and the teacher said, “Why don’t you build a dam so that water can be saved for the farm?” Āruṇī went to build a dam.

He started pouring dirt to build the dam. Regardless of how much dirt he poured, it all went with the flow of water as the water current was swift. He tried and tried, but failed. He was tired but he needed to stop the flow of water as it was the command of his teacher!

He finally got a brilliant idea. He spread himself on the ground, lying across the place where the water was flowing. He could thus stop the flow of water. It was late evening and he was thirsty and hungry. But, how could he leave? He was the dam! He decided to stay there as the dam!

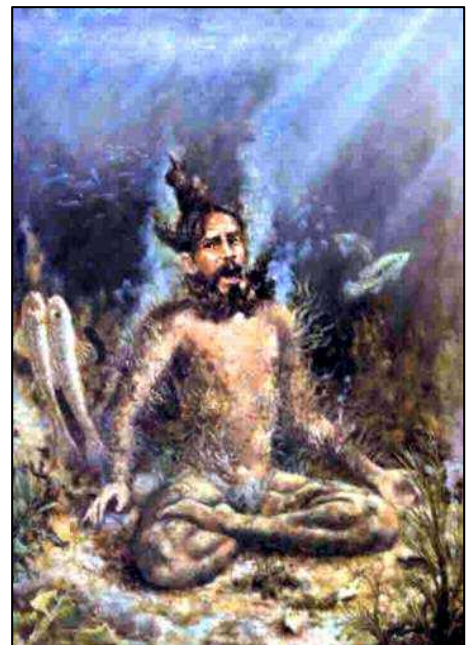
His teacher noticed that Āruṇī was not back from the farm. So, he along with a few other students went to look for Āruṇī. To the teacher’s surprise, Āruṇī was lying down on the ground as the dam, to prevent water from flowing down!

Rishi Dhaumya saw Āruṇī’s faith in the teacher and his words. Dhaumya was a man of wisdom and so he told Āruṇī that water will not flow down when he got up, because a dam had formed against his body as he lay on the ground for several hours. He blessed Āruṇī and told him that he would henceforth famous by the name Uddālaka. Due to his devotion to his Guru, Āruṇī became a great Rishi in his own right when he completed his education.

1.15 Rishi Saubhari:

The Shrimad Bhāgavata Purāṇa has the beautiful story of Rishi Saubhari, who decided to abandon the world and do his meditation inside water so that his mind never gets overcome by worldly attractions. But one day, he saw two fishes together and that sight was enough to make him deviate from his vow! He had decided not to marry but now seeing the fish, he suddenly had the desire to get married and have children, even though he was now a very old man.

This story shows how we must never lower our guard. Life is like a garden. To keep the garden beautiful and fresh at all times, we must constantly plant and trim our flowering plants. But at the same time, we can



never ignore the weeds that can grow and choke our flowers. Therefore, we must tend our flowers and also pluck the weeds regularly. The human mind is very fertile, like a fertilized garden. To keep it pure and beautiful, we should constantly engage ourselves in good activities (abhyāsa) and also keep making a constant effort to steer clear of bad things (vairāgya). We can never lower our guard, because it takes just a moment for negative thoughts and desires to enter our minds.

1.16 Rishi Mudgala: The Joy of Giving (Source: Mahābhārata 3.295)

Rishi Mudgala and his family in Kurukshetra spent most of their time in worship. He would gather excess grains scattered on the fields after the farmers had already harvested their crops, and feed themselves with this meager food. Despite his poverty, Mudgala was very hospitable. No guest visiting his home left without Mudgala offering him some food.



One day, Rishi Durvāsa came to test him. He asked Mudgala for food and ate everything that Mudgala could gather that day from the fields. This went on for several days in a row, but Rishi Mudgala did not complain even once. In fact, he would give his share of food to Rishi Durvāsa every day. On the seventh day, the latter blessed Rishi Mudgala, saying, “Despite your poverty, you did not give up your hospitality. By my Yogic powers, I will now summon Devatās to take you to heaven.” Immediately, Devatās appeared and requested Mudgala to come with them to heaven.

But Mudgala said that before leaving earth for heaven, he would like to know the length of his stay and the more about the pleasures of heaven. The Devatās answered, “You will stay in heaven as long as the fruit of your good karmas last. Heaven is a place full of pleasure – you will get the best food, drinks, clothes, homes and so on. You will be very happy till you live in heaven.”

Surprisingly, Rishi Mudgala refused to accompany them to heaven saying, “What is the use of heaven if I cannot stay there forever. And I get greater joy in serving others, than in feeding myself delicious food.” Rishi Mudgala then continued on the earth, worshipping regularly and feeding every guest. When he died, his soul reached Bhagavān forever, to enjoy complete happiness for all times to come.

1.17 Rishi Satyakāma Jabāla:

Once, a boy named Satyakāma Jābāla wanted to study a lot. He heard that Rishi Hāridrumata Gautama was a very renowned scholar and that he was accepting new students. So he approached Gautama with a request to take



him in as a student too. In those days, it was a custom for the teacher to ask about the family background of their students because the students had to live all the time with others in boarding schools. They would interact with each other throughout the day. A single student from a bad family could spoil the atmosphere of the boarding school. For this reason, famous teachers who ran the top-notch schools had to make sure that all of their students were from good families and had good values. Therefore, Gautama also asked Satyakāma, “What is your family background, and who are your mother and father?”

Now, Satyakāma had never seen his father. So he went to his mother to ask. When he put the question to her, she trembled with fear, but told him truthfully, “When I was young, I knew a lot of men. Therefore, I do not know who your father was. My name is Jābāla. Therefore you are Satyakāma Jābāla.” Now Satyakāma felt ashamed of what he heard. He thought that if he were to tell the truth to his teacher, he would be refused admission outright. But he decided to speak the truth.

When he approached the teacher, he found all other students in the classroom studying. The teacher asked him, ‘Did you find out about your family details?’ Satyakāma Jābāla said, “Guruji, my mother Jābāla does not know who my father was. Therefore, she said that I am Satyakāma Jābāla.” When the students heard this, there was a hushed silence, because they were all aghast. They were sure that Gautama would immediately turn him out of the school.

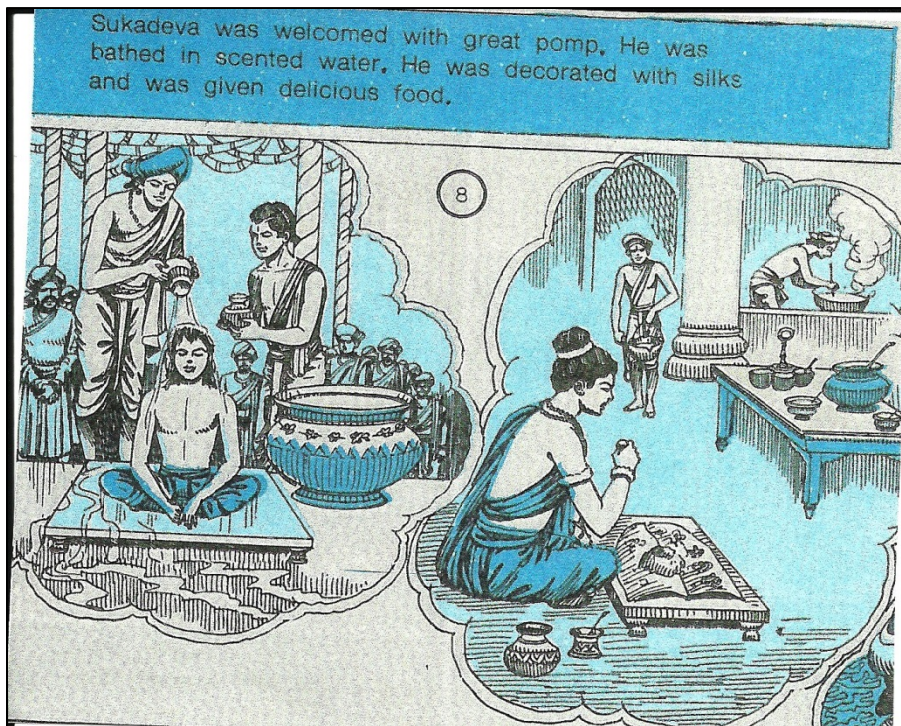
But Gautama said, “This child did not hesitate to speak the truth. And truth alone is the true mark of belonging to good family. And therefore, I have no hesitation to say that Satyakāma’s parents are both very noble because he did not hesitate to speak the truth to me. I will surely accept him as my student.”

And so, Satyakāma became a student of Gautama. In fact, in the course of time, he became a great Rishi himself, and compiled several Vedic and other Hindu scriptures. The Jābāla Upanishad, a sacred scripture of the Hindus named after him still exists and is highly respected to this day.

1.18 The Focus of Rishi Shukadeva

Vyasa was the greatest Rishi of his times. He lived in Kurukshetra northern India and in Badarika Ashrama in

the Himalayas. He had a son named Shukadeva, who showed great spiritual advancement even as a child and a teenager.



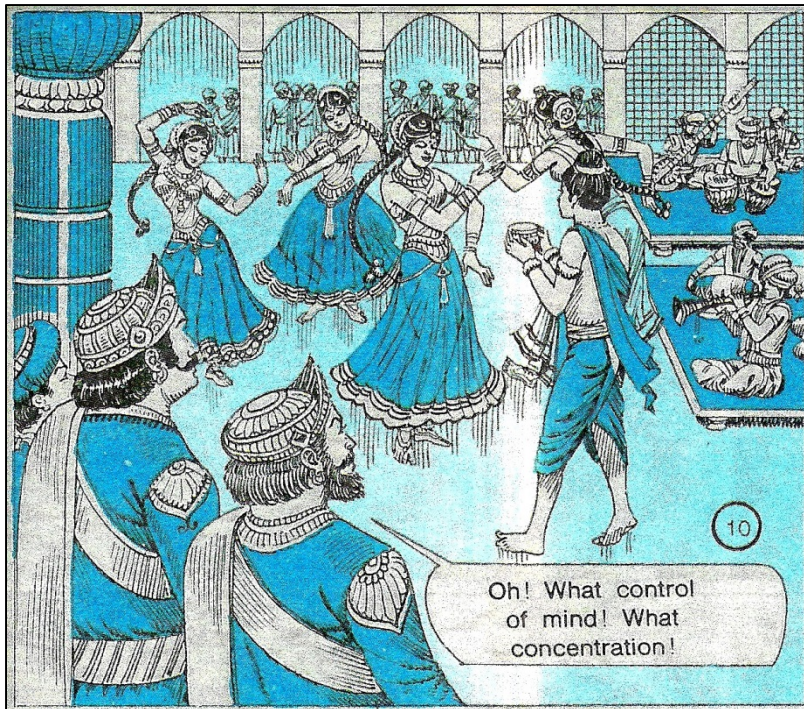
Once, Vyasa sent his son to study under King Janaka of Videha, who was renowned for his spiritual wisdom and knowledge. Shukadeva travelled almost 1000 km by foot from his father’s home to listen to the sermons in Videha. King Janaka, through his spiritual powers, learned beforehand that Vyasa’s son is coming to study under him, and he made preparations accordingly.

When Shukadeva reached the palace, the guards (as instructed) hardly paid any attention to him. They allowed him in to the assembly of the King, where he was offered a seat. For three days, King Janaka gave a sermon on Hindu spirituality. Shukadeva also listened intently, but no one paid attention to him even though he was the son of a great Rishi.

From the fourth day onwards however, things changed completely. The royal courtiers and officials gave Shukadeva a grand reception and welcomed him with pricey clothing, jewels and requested him to a lavish room for his stay. The teenager Shukadeva lived in his new lavish surroundings for 8 days. Janaka had asked his servants to keep

a watch on Shukadeva during all of the 11 days. The servants reported, “King, Shukadeva remained calm and composed throughout the time. He never showed any anger or frustration the first three days when no one gave any attention towards him. And in the following 8 days, he showed no joy or excitement when we showered him with presents and attention, and catered to each one of his needs.”

King Janaka then sent a request to Shukadeva to come to the royal court for a meeting. When Shukadeva appeared, the king was seated on his magnificent throne. Beautiful girls danced all around to keep everyone entertained. Janaka said to Shukadeva, “I am offering you a bowl of milk filled to the brim. I want you to place this bowl on your head, and make seven rounds inside the room around all of us. If you do not spill a single drop, then alone I will offer to teach you my wisdom.”



Shukadeva placed the bowl on his head cheerfully. While he walked around the room, the dancing girls continued with their song and dance. The crowd gathered in the room was talking loudly and paying attention to what the boy was doing. But Shukadeva did not get distracted by anything and successfully walked around the room 7 times without getting distracted by the dancing girls, the music, the richly dressed courtiers, the comments of other onlookers or by the worry that he will not succeed.

When the King saw Shukadeva finish this feat remarkably, he said, “Dear boy, there is nothing that I need to teach you. You do not feel insulted or frustrated when people ignore you or give you no importance. You do not feel

excited when you are surrounded by beautiful clothes, jewels, music, dance etc. This is the main quality that a person needs to have to advance spiritually. And in fact, only a spiritually advanced person can show this kind of equipoise and concentration. You have renounced mentally all attachments, attractions and aversions. Therefore, you do not need to study under me.”

Janaka was correct indeed, because Shukadeva became renowned as a great Rishi in his own right, and became the narrator of Shrimad Bhagavata Purāṇa to King Pareekshit later. Shukadeva attained Moksha in his father Vyasa’s own lifetime.

1.19 Rishi Kavasha Ailusha:

Once, a man named Kavasha Ailūsha approached a group of Rishis who were performing a Yajna on the banks of the Saraswati river. The Rishis did not permit him to join their Yajna, saying, “We are all high-born Brahmanas, whereas your mother was a maidservant. How can a lowly person like you join us in our religious ceremony?”



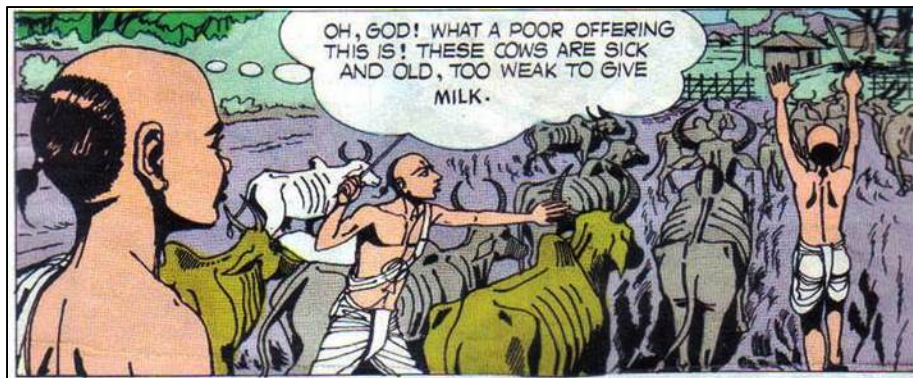
Kavasha Ailūsha was hurt. He then pointed them to the corpse of a Brahmana named Ātreya lying on the banks of the river. He asked them, “Now this person too was born in a very illustrious family. He led you in the performance of all Yajnas. Then, is he now superior to me too? Is he of equal rank as you all are?” The Rishis hung their heads in shame, and asked Kavasha to give them true knowledge. But Kavasha said, “Go to the Naimisha forest, and ask the Vālahilya Rishis to enlighten you.”

The Rishis then took leave of Kavasha Ailūsha and went to the Vālahilya Rishis. The latter then said, “Just like a chariot is just a piece of wood and metal without the driver because it cannot go anywhere, similarly, the body is just a corpse without the ātman, that makes it alive. The body can never be higher than the ātman. Between the two, the ātman is higher, and the body is low. And the same ātman is present inside every body.”

The Rishis who had initially humiliated were now chastened. They had unfairly insulted Kavasha Ailūsha because of his humble parentage, when the fact was that he had the same ātman that they had as well.

1.20 Nachiketa, the Child Rishi

Nachiketa was a very inquisitive little boy. One day, his father performed a grand yajna, in which he invited several poor Brahmanas and gifted cows and bulls to them. The Brahmanas would have used the cows to give them milk, and the bulls to help them in farming activities. Nachiketa was upset to note that the animals being donated by his father were very old and useless. He thought, “Perhaps my father can gift me to one of these Brahmanas. At least, the person who receives me will not criticize my father for giving a useless gift.”



He went to his father and said, “Dad, who will you give me as a gift to?” The father got very angry and said, “I will gift you to Yama, the Lord of Death.” And the words came true. Nachiketa died immediately and his ātman arrived at the doorstep of the palace of Yama.

Unfortunately, Yama was away, collecting the ātmans of other dead creatures. Nachiketa waited for three days, till Yama finally arrived. Seeing the little boy, hungry and thirsty, Yama felt sorry and offered three wishes to Nachiketa.

Let us now read the wonderful conversation that followed between Bhagavān Yama and Nachiketa:



Nachiketa: My first wish that my father gives up my anger towards me, and forgives me. When I return to him, he should forget that he had gifted me to Yama, and love me just as he has always loved me.

Yama: You are a very good boy. Even though your father cursed you to die, you still love him. I grant your wish.

Nachiketa: When humans perform Vedic worship in Yajnas, may one of the fires that they light be known as 'Nachiketa', after my own name. This is my second wish.

Yama: I grant you this wish too. From now on, a Vedic ceremony will have a fire named 'Nachiketa Agni.'

Nachiketa: And now my most important wish. Some people say that after death, we no longer exist. Others say that after we die, a part of us still lives. Bhagavān Yama, you alone can know the truth because you and your messengers visit us

when we are dying.

Yama: Nachiketa, I see that even though you are a little you are wiser than most adults. Please do not make me answer this question. In return, I will gift you all the things that make one happy – like palaces, chariots, toys, gold and so on. Please take these things instead, and do not insist that I grant your third wish.

Nachiketa: Bhagavān, all these riches like palaces and gold do not last forever. Someday, they all get destroyed. What is the use of my life if I cannot understand what happens to us after we die. Therefore, please do grant my third wish by answering this question.

Yama: Nachiketa, only a person like you who is not attracted towards pleasures and riches deserves to know the answer to this difficult question. Let me first explain to you what you are in reality. Think of yourself as a chariot. The most important part of the chariot is the master, who sits inside the chariot and travels from one place to another. The master is like your ātman, the soul. The chariot itself is like your body. The master has a charioteer who drives the chariot. This chariot is like your mind. The chariot is pulled by five horses, which are like your five senses – nose, ear, tongue, eyes and skin. The charioteer controls and steers the horses with the help of reins. Think of the reins as your intelligence, that helps you decide between the right and the wrong.

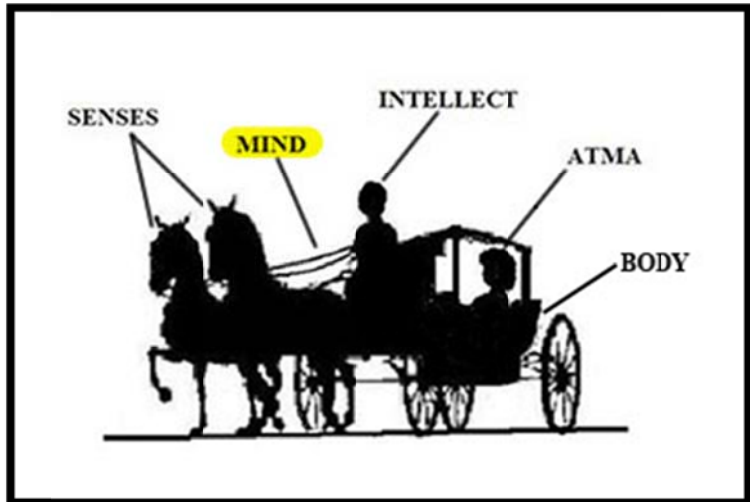


Nachiketa: I do not understand the meaning of myself as the chariot. Please explain more clearly.

Yama: OK. Tell me – what will happen if the charioteer does not control the horses properly, or if the reins are weak and keep breaking when the charioteer tries to pull them to control the horses?

Nachiketa: If that happens, the horses will each pull the chariot in different directions, and the chariot will not go much far. Or the ride will be very bumpy.

Yama: Exactly! Now you are understanding the whole thing well. If your senses, which are like the horses, are not controlled by the mind properly, they will keep pulling you in multiple directions. One moment, your nose likes to smell a flower and you will rush there. The next moment, your tongue will pull you in the direction of a delicious chocolate and you will rush there, forgetting everything else. Then, your eyes will attract you towards something else. This will continue to happen, and you will not go much farther because your senses, or your horses are not under control. So tell me, how can you control your horses, or your senses well?



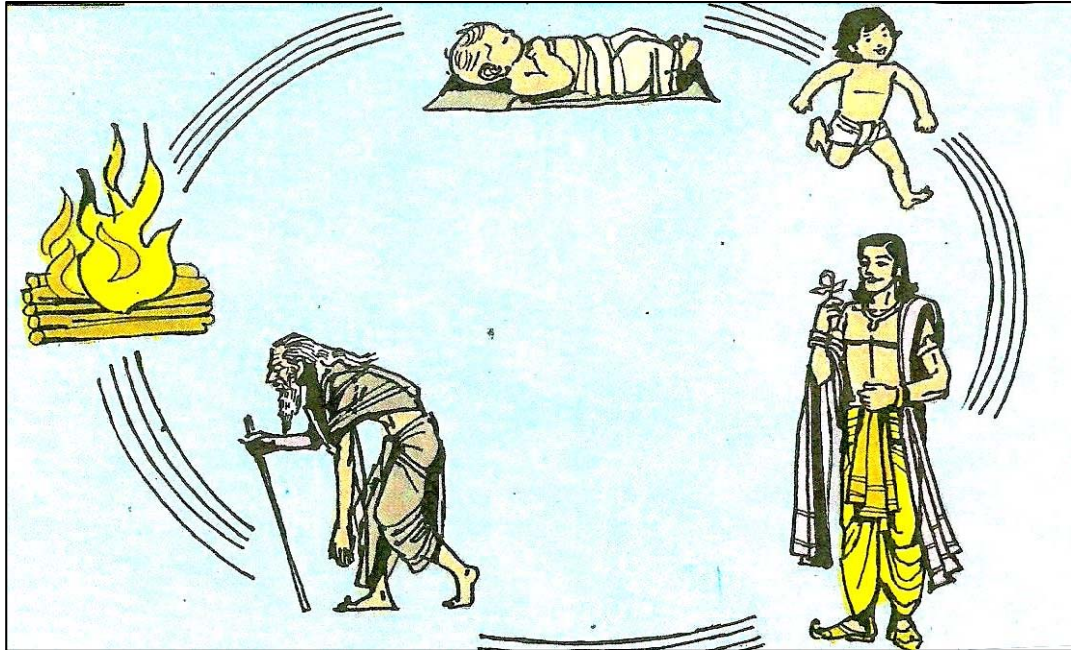
Nachiketa: I think, I can answer that. First, the charioteer must be disciplined and trained. Second, it should have strong reins, and must control the horses well.

Yama: You are correct Nachiketa. What this means is that to succeed in life, you must have a mind that is disciplined like a good charioteer. Then, you must have a strong intelligence, like strong reins, that can control your senses like unruly horses. Now I have another question for you. What happens if the chariot breaks down?

Nachiketa: In that case, the master will ask the charioteer to get off with his reins. They will find a new chariot and will fix the reins and the horses to that new chariot. Then, the master and the charioteer will sit on the new chariot, and carry on with their journey.

Yama: This is what happens in this world. Remember that I said that the chariot was like your body? When your body becomes old and dies, the ātman does not die. Instead, it moves out of the dead body along with the mind, the intelligence and the senses, and then

takes birth inside a new body.



Nachiketa: So what does that mean? Please explain to me more clearly.

Yama: What I am trying to say is this – when a person dies, it is only his body that dies. He, the ātman, does not die. The ātman takes along its mind, the intelligence and the senses from the body,

and then takes birth in another body. This is called rebirth.

Nachiketa: But surely, the master has a goal or a destination that he must reach.

Yama: Yes. The master has a final goal, and that final goal is Bhagavān. To reach that goal easily, it should have a good command over the mind. Also, the mind should be disciplined, and the intelligence should be strong, so that it can control the horses perfectly and make them travel in the right direction towards the goal. If the senses are not controlled, and if the mind is not disciplined, or if the intellect is not strong, the chariot and master will keep going round and round in circles and along wrong direction. The master, the ātman will have to replace his chariot hundreds of times before he reaches the goal after a very long time.

Nachiketa: Thank you Bhagavān Yama. Now I understand the truth perfectly. I am not my body. I am the ātman, the master of my body. I must have a disciplined mind. My intelligence must be strong. And my mind and intelligence must always control my five senses in the right direction. I must not become a slave of things that attract the senses, like junk food that pleases my tongue, gadgets that please my eyes, gossip that pleases my tongue. Instead, I must choose the right things so that I can quickly reach Bhagavān without too many rebirths.



Yama: Indeed, Nachiketa! You are a very gifted child. Now, I will return you to your father. Go back to earth, and live the rest of your life wisely with the knowledge that I have given to you.

On the earth, Nachiketa's dead body came back to life after having been dead for three days. Nachiketa's parents were overjoyed. His father was no longer angry with his son, and even forget how he had cursed him to die.

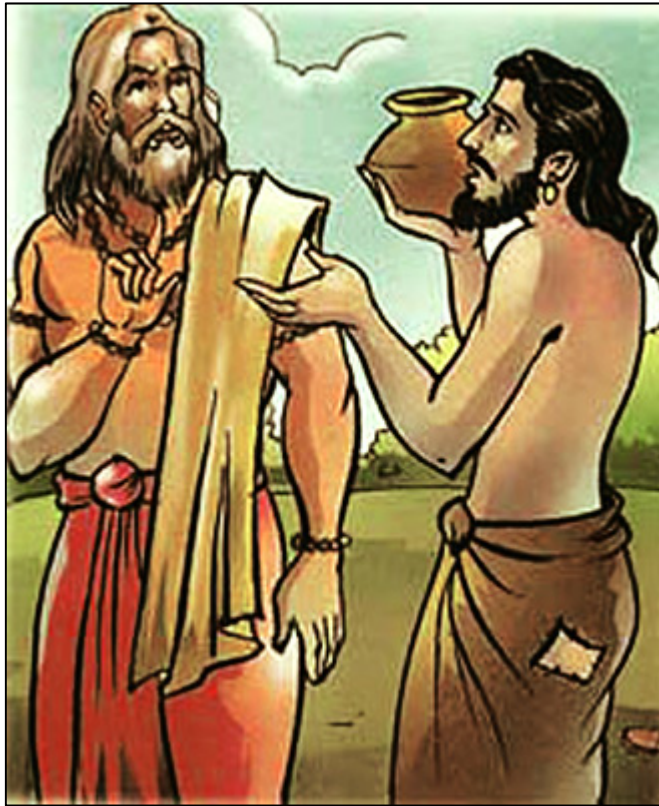
1.21 Rishi Jaigishavya, the Great Yogī describes the greatest source of joy¹²

Rishi Jaigishavya was a great master of meditation who lived thousands of years ago. His accomplishments are described in the Mahabharata. Due to his Yogic powers, he came to remember hundreds of his past lives. One day, a person asked him, “What has been your most joyous experience in all these lives? What do think brings the greatest joy?”

Rishi Jaigishavya replied, ***“True happiness results not from indulging in all kinds of temporary pleasures, but by being a balanced person and being contented. And even greater happiness is being one with Brahman (the Supreme Being), because that alone brings complete and eternal joy.”***

1.22 Rishi Uttanka

On his way to Dwaraka, Krishna met Rishi Uttanka, who had just come out of a long meditation and did not know what had happened for a long time in the world. The Sage asked Lord Krishna, “How are the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas doing? I was in meditation for a long time and therefore I do not have the latest news about them.” Lord Krishna then relayed to him the tragic news of how the war had killed all the Kauravas except Yuyutsu (who had sided with the Pāṇḍavas).



Sage Uttanka became very angry with Lord Krishna on hearing the news because he thought that Krishna could have prevented the war, if He had really wanted to. He threatened to curse Lord Krishna and blamed Him for the death of Kauravas. But, Krishna explained to him patiently how He had tried and tried to bring peace between the two families without success.

When Sage Uttanka heard these details, he repented for being angry with Lord Krishna unnecessarily. Lord Krishna forgave the Sage for his arrogance, and instead asked the Sage if he wanted a boon from Him. Now, Sage Uttanka lived in a desert region between Hastinapura and Dwaraka. Therefore, he requested, “Bhagavān, this place has a scarcity of water. Please make water available whenever I feel thirsty.” Lord Krishna replied, “Whenever you are thirsty, remember Me, and you will find water

immediately.” Then, He departed for his kingdom.

One day, when Sage Uttanka was travelling through the desert, he felt thirsty and therefore remembered Krishna. Immediately, a Chandala (a barbarian man) accompanied with two ferocious dogs appeared. The Chandala had a pot filled with water, and he offered to quench the Sage’s thirst. But the arrogant Sage thought that the Chandala was not worthy enough to offer water to him, and therefore he stepped back instead of accepting the water. The Sage thought that Krishna had played a cheap joke on him by sending such a lowly person to quench his thirst, and started criticizing Krishna instead. Immediately, the Chandala and his two dogs disappeared and instead, Krishna appeared.

The Sage said, “Lord! Why did you send that lowly Chandala to quench my thirst? How can an ascetic accept water from such a person?” Lord Krishna replied, “A Sage sees all creatures without prejudice, with the same eye. You have practiced so many spiritual austerities, and have practiced meditation for a very long time. Therefore, it was

¹² Source: Vyāsa’s commentary on Patanjali’s Yogasūtras.

unbecoming of you to have scorned someone because he was a Chandala. But you turned him away, and as a result, you remained thirsty. In reality, the Chandala was Indra, the King of Devas in heaven, and he had come with the nectar of immortality in his leather bag instead of water. But you judged him by his appearance, forgetting that the same Soul resides in him as it does in you.”

Hearing this, the Sage was greatly repentant and asked for forgiveness. He begged Krishna that there should be rain in the desert to quench the thirst of all creatures. Lord Krishna granted his wish. To this day, the clouds that rain water in the Indian desert are called Uttanka clouds.

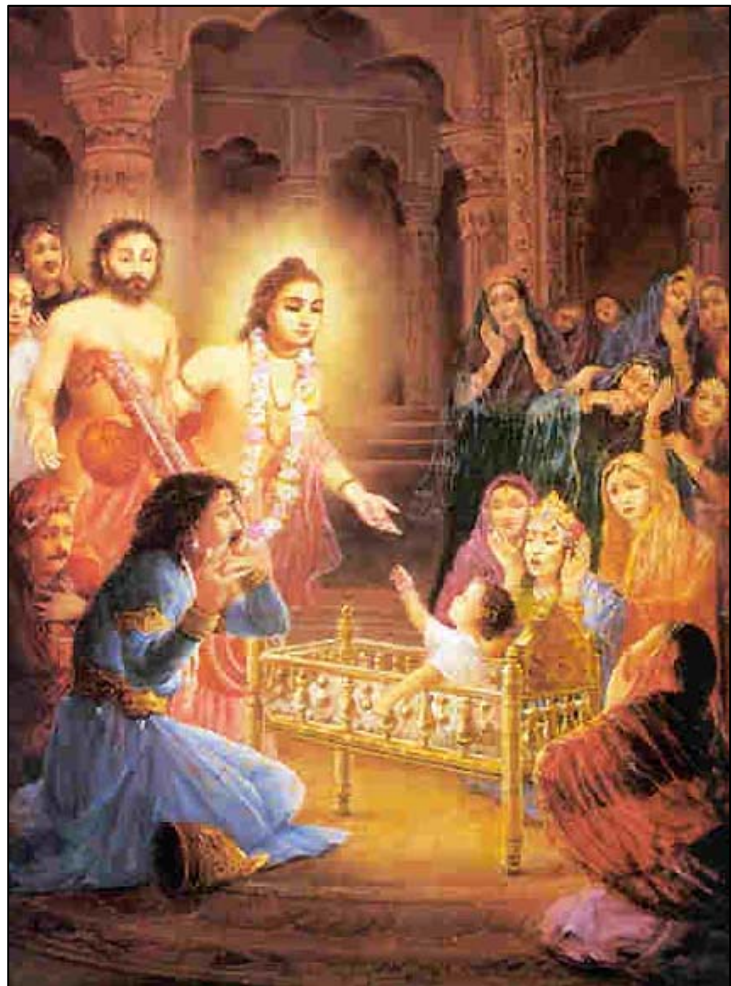
The story shows that God resides in everyone, and therefore we should not disrespect anyone just on the basis of superficial appearances. Krishna says the same thing to Arjuna in the Gita – *“The wise see the same (Supreme Lord) with an equal eye, in a learned and humble brāhmaṇa, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and even in a dog eater (outcast)”*. **Gita 5.18**

1.23 Rishi Angirasa

Although King Chitraketu had many queens, none of them bore him a child. He was very depressed, and worried about who will become the next king after him. Fortunately, due to the blessings of Rishi Angirasa, one of his queens gave birth to a Prince! The King was overjoyed. However, the other queens became very jealous. They were worried that the Prince’s mother will henceforth become the Chief Queen and the favorite of the King. Therefore, they conspired together and poisoned the infant Prince to death.

King Chitraketu’s grief knew no bounds, and he lamented over the dead body of his son. Rishi Angirasa happened to stop by along with Rishi Narada. The King served him with respect and begged the Rishi, “Respected Sir, through your spiritual powers, you can bring my dead son back to life. I beg you, please revive him. He is the greatest joy of my life, the heir to my kingdom.”

Rishi Angirasa tried to explain to the King, ‘Everyone who is born has to die one day. Some die at an old age, some die young. It is against the rules of nature to revive a dead person. Let go off your attachments and accept the reality of death, no matter how dear you son is to you.’ Rishi Narada also counselled him saying, “This world is like an ocean and we humans are like the infinite number of sand-grains on its shore. Two grains come together for some time, only to be separated by waves eventually. And these same two grains might come together again in the future. Dear King, accept this fact of life – that all relationships eventually come to an end.” But King Chitraketu and his Queen would not let go their grief, and they begged piteously again and again. Out of compassion, Rishi Narada revived the dead boy. King Chitraketu and his Queen were overjoyed. But a surprise awaited them.



The boy spoke to his parents like a spiritually realized adult. He said, "I did not go anywhere. When I left my body, I recollected all of my past lives through the grace of Rishi Angirasa. I have lived in many bodies before this one. I have had many fathers and many mothers. Therefore, who is my real father and who is real mother? I have never died, and I was never born. It was merely my bodies that died and took birth. I performed numerous karmas in each live, and was reborn to reap the results of my deeds. I have realized that I am, in reality, the eternal, unchanging, pure and free Atman."

Saying this, the boy died once again, because he did not want to get attached to his parents. King Chitraketu and his Queen understood the purport of their son's words. Their attachments disappeared when they realized that all relationships are temporary and end one day. It is only our soul that is permanent. The only permanent relationship that we have is with the Divine, and He is our goal. Swami Sivananda explains the principle of this story with the help of another example from our daily lives:

"Life is like a manuscript, and each individual person is an author of that manuscript. In this manuscript of life, some of the pages are missing – the beginning and end have been misplaced, and one cannot recollect what he has written in them. He has only the middle portion with him, and that portion tells what he is in this present life. He knows he is here, but he does not know from where he has come, why he has come, or where he will go."



2. Emperors of the Solar Dynasty: The Ancestors of Bhagavān Rama

There were two major royal Hindu dynasties in ancient India – The Solar Dynasty (Sūryavansha) and the Lunar Dynasty (Chandravansha). Bhagavān Rama belonged to the Sūryavansha, and Krishna to the Chandravansha. Both of these dynasties gave rise to several other sub-dynasties in ancient Indian subcontinent. Let us read about some great Kings of the Sūryavansha in this chapter.

2.1 Emperors Sagar, Amshumān, Dilīpa and Bhagīratha

How the Ganga River came to the Earth

The Ganga (also called 'Ganges') is the holiest river for the Hindus. The story that we will read now tells us how Ganga came down to this earth, according to the Hindu scriptures.

A great king named Sagar ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya several thousand years ago. He had two wives – Sumati and Keshinī. From them, he had 60,001 sons. Sagar decided to do an Ashvamedha Yajna. This was a grand ceremony after which he was to be crowned as the emperor of the whole world. But for one year before the ceremony, a white horse would be let loose on the earth. The horse would be free to go anywhere it wanted. If anyone captured that horse during that one year, he would have to fight the army of Sagar. If Sagar lost in this war, he could not become the emperor of the world. But if Sagar defeated everyone who had captured his horse, he would win and become emperor of the world.



When the horse started walking around, Sagar's sons started following it. Now, in heaven, Indra became worried. He was the king of all the devatās in heaven. But if Sagar became the King of the whole earth, he might then also start attacking heaven. Indra played a trick to defeat Sagar. He stole the horse, and hid it in a cave where Rishi Kapila was meditating.

The sons of Sagar reached the cave in search of that horse. They saw that the horse was standing next to Rishi Kapila, and they thought that he had stolen it. They got very angry at the Rishi and started to beat him. Rishi Kapila was a great saint and he got angry. He

looked at the sons of Sagar and fire came out of his eyes. In a few minutes, all the sons of Sagar got burned and their bodies turned into ashes.

When the horse and his sons did not show up in Ayodhya for a long time, Sagar asked his grandson Amshumān to go and search for them. When Amshumān reached the cave, he saw the horse, and Rishi Kapila in meditation. Amshumān was a great devotee of Bhagavān Vishnu. He realized immediately that Rishi Kapila was an Avatāra of none other than Vishnu. He bowed to the Rishi, said a prayer to him and got His blessings. The Rishi was pleased with Amshumān. He told Amshumān of what had happened to his Uncles. He said, "Your uncles had done a great evil act by trying to harm me when I was meditating. The only way they can get rid of that sin is to bring Ganga

waters to earth, and make them flow on the ashes of their burned bodies.” Amshumān took the horse back to Sagar, where they completed the Ashvamedha Yajna. Sagar was now the emperor of the whole world.

After Sagar, Amshumān became the emperor. He remembered what Rishi Kapila had said about freeing his uncles from evil by bringing the waters of Ganga. So he meditated a lot and prayed to get the Ganga on the earth, but he failed. After Amshumān, his son Dilīpa became the emperor and he too tried to get the Ganga to the earth. But he failed as well. After Dilīpa, his son Bhagīratha became the next emperor.



Bhagīratha was very determined to free his ancestors from evil. He did not give up his meditation and worship. Finally, Ganga appeared in front of him and said, “I am willing to come down to the earth. But I have one worry. The force of my water falling from the heaven will be so great that it will destroy the earth. Bhagīratha now prayed to Shiva.

Shiva was pleased with Bhagīratha and said, “Here is the plan – when Ganga descends from the abode of Vishnu to the earth, I will stand in the way. My long hair will capture the following waters. This way, they will not fall directly to the earth, and therefore the earth will not get destroyed by the river’s force. The plan worked. Ganga fell from the skies on Shiva’s hair. Bhagīratha walked away from Shiva towards the ashes of his ancestors. The river Ganga’s waters followed Bhagīratha obediently till they flowed over the ashes.

With the touch of the water, the ashes got transformed into the bodies of the sons of Sagar. Then, they all arose and reached heaven. River Ganga also provided water to millions of farmers to grow crops, and water to humans and animals for drinking. Without the waters of Ganga, India cannot not survive and become a great country. Therefore, Hindus call the Ganga as ‘Ma Ganga’ which means ‘Mother Ganges’ because she nourishes us just like a mother nourishes her children. The river Ganga is also called Bhāgīrathī, because it was due to the efforts of Bhagīratha that she came down to the earth.

The story of Sagar, Amshumān, Dilīpa and Bhagīratha gives us a very important lesson. *Sometimes, it takes not just one but many people in many generations to complete a big task. Therefore, we should not lose patience if we do not succeed. Instead, many more people should join in the efforts to achieve the goal and complete the task for the good of everyone - even if it takes many generations of people to do so.*

2.2 Harishchandra, the Truthful King

Several thousand years ago, the city of Ayodhya was ruled by King Harishchandra. He was a very good king who took great care of everyone in his kingdom. He was famous for being truthful and fair. He was married to Queen Chandramatī. Together, they had a son named Rohitāshva (‘Rohita’ for short).

One day, Rishi Vishvamitra decided to test Harishchandra. By his powers of Yoga, Vishvamitra changed his form to become a wild pig. This pig played havoc in Ayodhya. Everyone was fed up of the pig. Harishchandra decided to get rid of the pig himself. He started chasing the pig out of the city and entered a jungle. As he was chasing the pig in the forest, Harishchandra lost his way. The pig disappeared.

In fact, the pig had changed itself into a Brāhmana. When the king saw the Brāhmana, he bowed out of respect. He did not recognize the fact that it was the Rishi who had changed himself to a pig and then to a Brāhmana. The king asked the Brāhmana if he knew the way back to Ayodhya. The king promised to give any gift to the Brāhmana

if he could help him reach his palace in Ayodhya. The Brāhmana agreed and asked the king to follow him, till they reached Ayodhya.

There, in Ayodhya, the Brāhmana reminded the king of his promise. He now changed himself to his true form of Vishvamitra. Then he said, "I want you to gift your entire kingdom to me." The king was shocked, but he had to keep his promise. But the Brāhmana then put in one more condition, "What you gave to me was only because you had given me a promise. I am a very respected Rishi. Therefore, I want you to give me some additional donations too."

Now, Harishchandra was in a fix. He had already given away everything to Vishvamitra. So he requested, "Rishi, please give me one month. I and my wife will arrange some money and give the promised donation." Vishvamitra agreed.

The king, his wife and their son now walked from Ayodhya to another city named Varanasi. Harishchandra searched work for several days. But no one offered him a job. One month was almost over and Harishchandra now really got worried. Chandramatī felt sad to see her husband so upset. So she said, "Why don't you sell me as a maid to someone. With that money, you can give the donation to Vishvamitra."

Harishchandra was very surprised to hear this. But he had no choice. This time, Vishvamitra took on another disguise and appeared in front of them. He offered to buy Chandramatī and Rohitāshva for some money. Harishchandra took all the money to Sage Vishvamitra's home and offered it as donation. But Vishvamitra was not happy, "What! This is so little. I need more. By the sunset today, you must get me some more money for donation." So, Harishchandra started looking for another job.

Luckily, the owner of a cremation ground (a place where dead bodies are burned) offered him the job of a doorkeeper. Harishchandra's duty was to collect money from the families who brought in the dead for cremation. Meanwhile, while Rohitāshva was playing on the banks of the Ganga river, a snake bit him and he died. Now Chandramatī almost became mad with grief. She begged her master to let her go so that she could at least take her dead son for a cremation. But the master (who was actually Vishvamitra in disguise) said, "I have already lost money because your son has died. I had paid money to get him, did I not? Now I want you to work during the day. In the night, you can carry your son's dead body and take him for cremation."

At night, Chandramatī carried her son's body to the cremation ground. Due to darkness and because she was so sad, her voice and appearance had changed. The doorkeeper, who was none other than her husband Harishchandra, did not recognize her. He demanded a fee for the ticket before she could enter the cremation ground. Chandramatī cried and said, "I do not have any money. The only thing I have is this Mangalasutra. Take it, and let me go in so that I can at least cremate my son." A mangalasūtra is a necklace of black beads and gold that is worn by all married Hindu women. When

Harishchandra saw the mangalasūtra, he immediately realized that it was none other than his wife. And it was none other than their son who had died! Both of them wept a lot at their bad luck and at their condition.

But Harishchandra was so honest that he would not permit his own wife to cremate their son till she had paid the fee for entering the cremation ground. So the two made a deal – they said, "There is nothing more left in our life. Our only son has died. We have no money. And there



is no way we can be happy. Let us cremate ourselves with our son's body."

So Harishchandra set up a pile of woods. On it, he placed Rohitāshva's body. Then, he and his wife started to enter the fire. But as soon as they took a step towards the fire, a miracle happened. Rohita came back to life, the fire blew out. Devatās appeared in the sky, and they saw Rishi Vishvamitra standing right next to them.

The Rishi said, "Dear King Harishchandra, I was only testing your honesty. You had to suffer so much and yet, you tried everything that you could have done to give me my donation. You have kept your word. You are a very great man. I have brought your son back to life." Then, Rishi Vishvamitra returned the kingdom to Harishchandra.

Now the king and queen returned to their palace in Ayodhya, where they ruled with fairness for several years. And after their death, they were both taken to heaven, because they had been so truthful in their entire life.

The story of King Harishchandra teaches us that once we give a promise, we should keep it. We may have to suffer a lot to keep our promise. But we should not break our word given to someone else.

DID YOU KNOW? The story of King Harishchandra has been very famous in India. Mahatma Gandhi was inspired a lot by the honesty of this king. To honor him, the very first movie made in India (in the year 1913) was 'Raja Harishchandra'. The movie was 40 minutes long. It was in black and white (not in color) and was a 'silent movie' because in those days, we did not have the technology to record the voice of actors and play it along with the scenes in the movie. The film was made by Dada Saheb Phalke and was a super hit. This was the only movie that Mahatma Gandhi ever watched. Today, India makes the largest number of movies among all the countries of the world, but 'Raja Harishchandra' was the very first Indian movie.



Trick Question: What was the language in which the characters of the movie 'Raja Harishchandra' spoke?

2.3 King Ambarisha

King Ambarisha was a great Bhakta of Bhagavan Vishnu. Every 11th day of the month, he did not eat food. He spent the entire day worshipping Vishnu, and in feeding poor people, teachers and stray animals. Bhagavan Vishnu really loved Ambarisha. This made some people jealous of Ambarisha and they decided to cause trouble to him.



One day, King Ambarisha was fasting when Rishi Durvasa came to his palace. Everyone was scared of Durvasa because he used to get angry very easily. Durvasa said to Ambarisha, "I have come as your guest. I am a great Rishi. Everyone respects me. I want you to give me food. But first, I will go and take a bath. Keep in mind that you cannot eat anything till you give food to me." King Ambarisha agreed and bowed to Durvasa with respect.



Durvasa went to the bath but just kept bathing. Several hours passed but Durvasa did not come back. Ambarisha started feed the poor people, teachers and stray animals. But he did not eat anything himself. Several more hours passed, but Durvasa still did not come back. Then, some priests said to Ambarisha, “You must eat after some time. Otherwise Bhagavan Vishnu will not be happy.” Therefore, Ambarisha just sipped some water, but he did not eat anything.

Suddenly, Durvasa came back. He became very angry when he saw Ambarisha drinking water. Durvasa said, “You are very rude. I told you not to eat or drink anything before I came back. You have insulted me by drinking water before giving some food to me! I will have to punish you for this.”

Then, Rishi Durvasa used his magical powers to make a fiery demon. But to protect his Bhakta King Ambarisha, Bhagavan Vishnu immediately sent his Sudarshana Chakra.

The Sudarshana Chakra immediately killed the demon. Then, the Chakra started flying towards Rishi Durvasa to kill him. Durvasa became very scared and he started running everywhere. Finally, he reached Vaikuntha, where Bhagavan Vishnu lives. Durvasa said to Vishnu, “Please save me from your Sudarshana Chakra. I do not want to die.”

Vishnu replied, “You have tried to kill my Bhakta King Ambarisha. That was not a good thing to do. My Sudarshana Chakra will stop chasing you on one condition. You will have to go to Ambarisha and say sorry to him. And you will have to promise Me that you will control your anger.” Rishi Durvasa agreed. He rushed to Ambarisha and said sorry for his mistake. He also promised to Vishnu that he will never ever get angry towards Bhaktas of Vishnu. The Sudarshana Chakra suddenly disappeared and went back to Bhagavan Vishnu.

Further Research:

The Sūryavansha Dynasty had numerous other famous kings not discussed in this chapter, like Shveta, Raghu, Dasharatha and the most famous of all, Bhagavān Rāma, followed by his sons Kusha and Lava. Research them and learn what great deeds they did. How was Buddha related to the Solar Dynasty, and how did the rule of their kings in Ayodhyā come to an end?

3. Emperors of the Lunar Dynasty

3.1 Emperor Yayāti & Puru

Story: No one ever gets satisfied with running after pleasures (from Matsya Purāṇa)



Many people say – “There is only one life. So let us enjoy. Who knows if there will be tomorrow.” Hindu scriptures narrate the story of Emperor Yayāti who was devoted excessively to the pleasures of senses. Emperor Yayāti had two wives and many sons. He loved to live a ‘good’ life, indulging in all kinds of pleasure. When he grew old, he was unable to indulge in such pleasures, but his mind still longed for them. So he asked his sons one by one to exchange his youth for their father’s old age. The first three sons refused, and out of anger, he cursed them. The fourth son Puru was very obedient and he exchanged his youth for his father’s old age.

And then, Yayāti lived through another youth and enjoyed pleasures of senses. When he grew old again, he realized

that he was still not satisfied. Now Yayāti felt very guilty that he had cursed his own sons, and deprived his own obedient son of his youth which had rightfully belonged to his son alone. And even after living a second youth, his desires for physical pleasures was not satisfied. He realized the folly of having deprived his own son of his youth, and narrated the following famous verses quoted in several Hindu scriptures (Brahma Purāṇa 10.40-46):

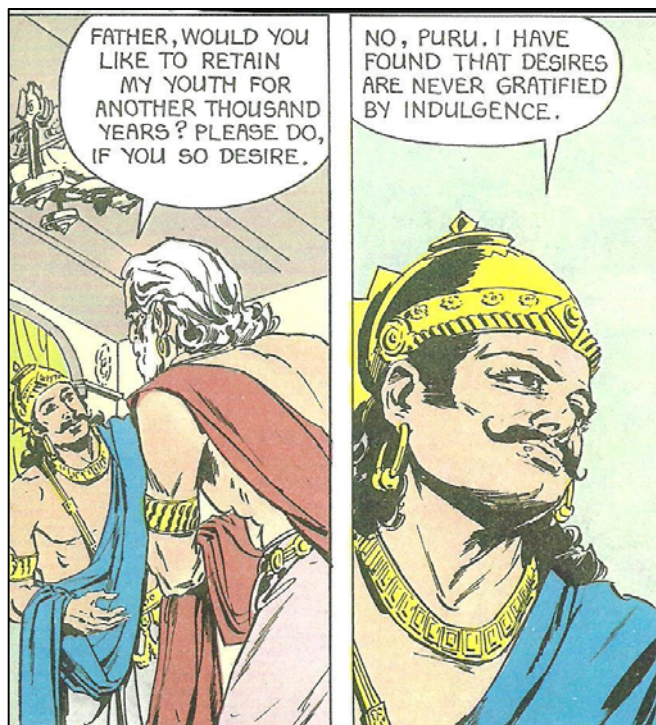
"He who withdraws within himself all pleasures like the tortoise that draws his limbs within itself is indeed a person who has attained the state of Yoga. Never does desire for pleasure subside by indulging in their enjoyment. Just as the fire blazes all the more when Ghee is poured into it, so also it increases at every indulgence."

If one were to possess all the grains of rice and barley on the earth, if one were to possess all the gold, if one were to become the master of all the cattle wealth on the earth or if one were to marry all women on the earth-- he will discover that even this is not sufficient to satiate his thirst.

That being so, one should not be deluded by these things. When one does not have any ill will towards any living being, whether in mind, in word, or in deed, then only does one attain Brahman.

When one is not afraid of others, when none is afraid of him, or when one does not like or dislike others too much, then alone one attains Brahman.

Happiness befalls a person who eschews greed and covetousness-- evils which can never be eschewed by the wicked, evils which do not become old even when one's own body becomes old and decrepit, evils which are like an ailment that comes to end only when the vital airs die out.



When a man becomes old, his hair become old, his teeth become old; but alas! The hope and greed for wealth and a prolonged life never grows old!

The happiness that supposedly arises from indulgence in pleasures and also the great happiness that one attains in heaven-- all these are not equal to even the 16th part of the happiness one attains when his greed is extinguished."

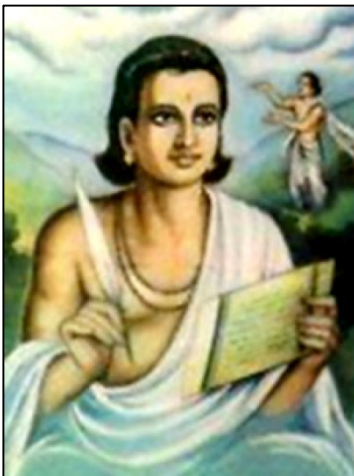
Yayāti then decided to devote the remainder of his life to worship Bhagavān, practice Yoga and understand the nature of the truth. And when he died, he went to heaven. This story shows how a blind pursuit of pleasures of the senses (tongue, eyes, ears etc.) makes us so selfish that we forget the welfare of even our closest friends and family. Therefore, we should realize that there are more important things in life – Dharma and Bhagavān. These alone should be our more important goals of life.

3.2 Emperor Bharata: How India got its name 'Bhārata'

Several thousand years ago in northern India, there ruled King Dushyanta of the Puru Dynasty.¹³ One day, he was hunting in the forest and lost his way. He came across the Āshrama¹⁴ of Rishi Kaṇva, who happened to be away at that time. Kaṇva's daughter Shakuntalā welcomed the King into the Āshrama and offered him food, water and a place to rest. King Dushyanta spent a few days in the Āshrama and fell in love with her. The two married, but soon, it was time for King to return to his palace.

When he took leave of her, he told Shakuntalā, "When your father returns, please come with him to my capital. Keep this royal ring that I wear. By showing the ring to the guards, you will be able to enter my palace. And I will also recognize you through the ring. Then we will celebrate our wedding officially."

After a few days, when Rishi Kaṇva returned, Shakuntalā was lost in the thoughts of her husband. She did not see her father arrive and ignored him. Rishi Kaṇva got upset and cursed her, "May he, about whom you are thinking, forget you." When Shakuntalā told her father that his curse meant that her own husband will forget her, he really regretted having uttered the curse. He said to her, "Let us go to Dushyanta's palace immediately before he really forgets you."



On the way, they stopped by the Gangā River. When Shakuntalā went to take a bath in the river, the ring unfortunately slipped out of her finger and a fish swallowed it! Shakuntalā was terrified, and the worst that she had imagined really happened. When she reached the palace, King Dushyanta had forgotten her because of her father's curse. Shakuntalā did not have the ring to remind him of their marriage either.

DID YOU KNOW? In the fourth century C.E., there was a famous poet in India called Kālidāsa. He used this story of Dushyanta and Shakuntalā to write a famous play called the *Abhigyanā-Shākuntalam*.

Kālidāsa was such an excellent author of plays and dramas that he is often called the 'Shakespeare of India'. Actually, Shakespeare lived about 1200 years after Kālidāsa. Therefore, it is perhaps better to call him as the 'Kālidāsa of England' because a later person is always named after an earlier one.

Shakuntalā soon gave birth to a son whom she named Bharata. He was a very brave child, and loved to play with lions because he was not afraid of them. In fact, he was so brave and strong that he would tie them with a rope to a tree, and then count their teeth!

¹³ This dynasty was named after their ancestor King Puru, the son of Yayāti.

¹⁴ In ancient India. Rishis lived away from towns and cities, and they built their cottage in forests. In these cottages, they spent most of their time in meditation and worship. Sometimes, they also ran schools for children. These cottages with the schools next to them were called Āshramas.

One day, a fisherman caught the fish that had swallowed the ring. When he cut open the fish, he was amazed to find the precious ring. He went to the market to sell it. Some passers-by thought, “How can this poor fisherman get an expensive ring like this?” Therefore, they went and reported to the royal police, who immediately came and arrested him. When the fisherman was produced before King Dushyanta with the ring, the King immediately got his memory back. Now, he suddenly remembered his dear wife. He went to search for her and finally found her with Bharata, who was playing with a lion at that time. Dushyanta was happy to see that he had a brave son, and brought his family to the palace to live with him.

After King Dushyanta, Bharata became the next King of the kingdom. He was a very just and a powerful ruler. Hindus believe that he united the entire land of the present-day countries of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal into one country. His empire came to be known as ‘Bhārata’ after his own name.

King Bharata thought that all his nine sons were cruel and unfit to rule Bhārata after him. Therefore, he invited Bhūmanyu, the son of Rishi Bharadvāja to become the next King of Bhārata. This act shows how concerned King Bharata was about the happiness of the people of his country. In fact, the people of his country came to be known as ‘Bhāratiya’, a name that is still used for Indians.



DID YOU KNOW? The word ‘Bhārata’ also means a person who is always busy (‘rata’) in getting knowledge and wisdom (‘bha’). Therefore, true Bhāratiyas are people who make a lot of effort to study and acquire a good education. Today, the word ‘Bhārata’ is applied mainly to India because only Indians (as well as the people of Nepal) have kept alive the ancient culture and religion of Bhārata. People of other countries now follow a different religion that came from countries outside of Bhārata.

Now let us read about the later life and future lives of King Bharata in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, in the words of Swami Vivekananda.



“The great king Bharata in his old age gave over his throne to his son, and retired into the forest. He who had been ruler over millions and millions of subjects, who had lived in marble palaces, inlaid with gold and silver, who had drunk out of jeweled cups – this king built a little cottage with his own hands, made of reeds and grass, on the banks of a river in the Himalayan forests. Then he lived on roots and wild herbs, collected by his own hands, and constantly meditated upon Him who is always present in the soul of man. Days, months, and years passed. One day, a deer came to drink water nearby where the royal sage was meditation. At the same moment, a lion roared at a little distance off. The deer was so terrified that she, without satisfying her thirst, made a big jump to cross the river. The deer was with young, and this extreme exertion and sudden fright made her give birth to a little fawn, and immediately after she fell dead. The fawn fell into the water and was being carried rapidly away by the foaming stream, when it caught the eyes of the king. The king rose from his position of meditation and rescuing the fawn from

the water, took it to his cottage, made a fire, and with care and attention fondled the little thing back to life. Then the kindly sage took the fawn under his protection, bringing it up on soft grass and fruits. The fawn thrived under the paternal care of the retired monarch, and grew into a beautiful deer. Then, he whose mind had been strong enough to break away from lifelong attachment to power, position, and family, became attached to the deer which he had saved from the stream. As he became fonder and fonder of the deer, the less and less he could concentrate his mind upon the Lord. When the deer went out to graze in the forest, if it were late in returning, the mind of the royal sage would become anxious and worried. He would think, "Perhaps my little one has been attacked by some tiger – or perhaps some other danger has befallen it; otherwise, why is it late?"

Some years passed in this way, but one day death came, and the royal sage laid himself to die.

But his mind, instead of being intent upon the self, was thinking about the deer; and with his eyes fixed upon the sad looks of his beloved deer, his soul left the body. As a result of this, in the next birth he was born as a deer. But no Karma is lost, and all the great and good deeds done by him as a king and sage bore their fruit. The fruit was a born



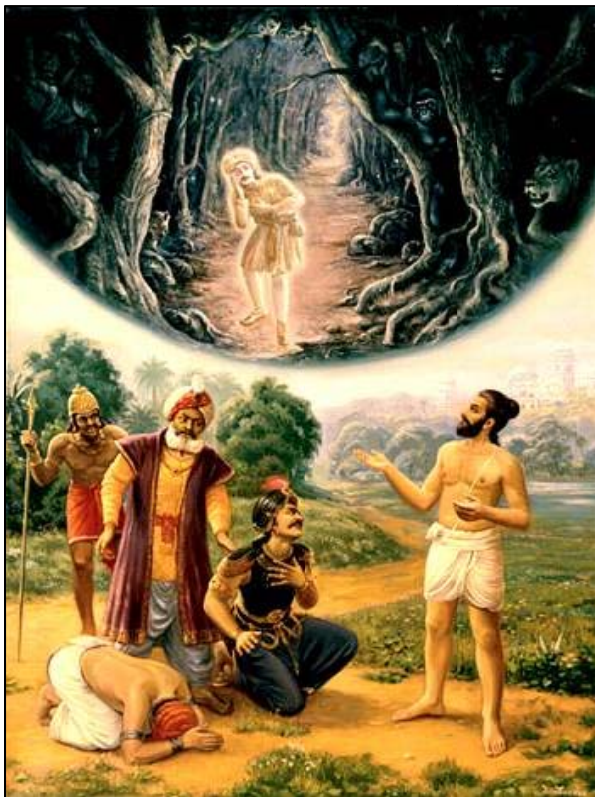
Jatismara, and remembered his past birth, though he was bereft of speech and living in an animal body. He always left his companions and was instinctively drawn to graze near hermitages where oblations were offered and the Upanishads were preached.

After the usual years of a deer's life had been spent, it died and was born as the youngest son of a rich Brahmin. And in that life also, he remembered all his past, and even in his childhood was determined no more to get entangled in the good and evil of life. The child, as it grew up, was strong and healthy, but would not speak a word, and lived as one inert and insane, for fear of getting mixed up with worldly affairs. His thoughts were always on the Infinite, and he lived only to wear out his past Prarabdha Karma. In course of time the father died, and the sons divided the property among themselves; and thinking that the youngest was a dumb, good-for-nothing man, they seized their share. Their charity, however extended only so far as to give him enough food to live upon. The lives of the brothers were often very harsh to him, putting him to do all the hard work; and if he was unable to do everything they wanted, they would treat him very unkindly. But he showed neither vexation nor fear, and neither did he speak a word. When they persecuted him very much, he would stroll out of the house and sit under a tree, by the hour, until their wrath was appeased, and then he would quietly go home again.



One day, when the wives of the brothers had treated him with more than usual unkindness, Bharata went out of a tree and rested. Now it happened that the king of the country was passing by, carried in a palanquin on the shoulders of bearers. One of the bearers had unexpectedly fallen ill, and so his attendants were looking about for a man to replace him. They came upon Bharata seated under a tree; and seeing that he was a strong young man, they asked him if he would take the place of the sick man in bearing the king's palanquin. But Bharata did not reply. Seeing that he was so able-bodied, the king's servants caught hold of him and placed the pole on his shoulders. Without speaking a word, Bharata went on. Very soon after this, the king remarked that the palanquin was not being evenly carried, and looking at the palanquin addressed the new bearer, saying, "Fool, rest a while; if thy shoulders pain thee, rest a while." Then Bharata laying the pole of the palanquin down, opened his lips for the first time in his life, and spoke,

"Whom do you, O King, call a fool? Whom do you ask to lay down the palanquin? Who do you say is weary? Whom do



you address as 'you'? If you mean, O King, by the word 'you' this mass of flesh, it is composed of the same culture as yours; it is unconscious, and it knows no weariness and it knows no pain. If it is the mind, the mind is the same as yours; it is universal. But if the word 'you' is applied to something beyond that, then it is the Self, the Reality in me, which is the same as in you, and it is the One in the universe. Do you mean, O King, that the Self can ever be weary, that it can ever be tired, that it can ever be hurt? I did not want, O King – this body did not want to trample the poor warms crawling on the road, and therefore, in trying to avoid them, the palanquin moved unevenly. But the Self was never tired; It was never weak; It never bore the pole of the palanquin: for it is omnipotent and omnipresent." And so he dwelt eloquently on the nature of the soul, and on the highest knowledge, etc. The King, who was proud of his learning, knowledge, etc., and philosophy, alighted from the palanquin, and fell at the feet of Bharata, saying, "I ask thy pardon, O mighty one, I did not know that you were a sage, when I asked you to carry me." Bharata blessed him and departed. He then resumed the even tenor of his previous life. When Bharata left the body, he was freed forever from the bondage of birth."¹⁵

¹⁵ *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama: Calcutta (1989), volume 4, pages 111-114

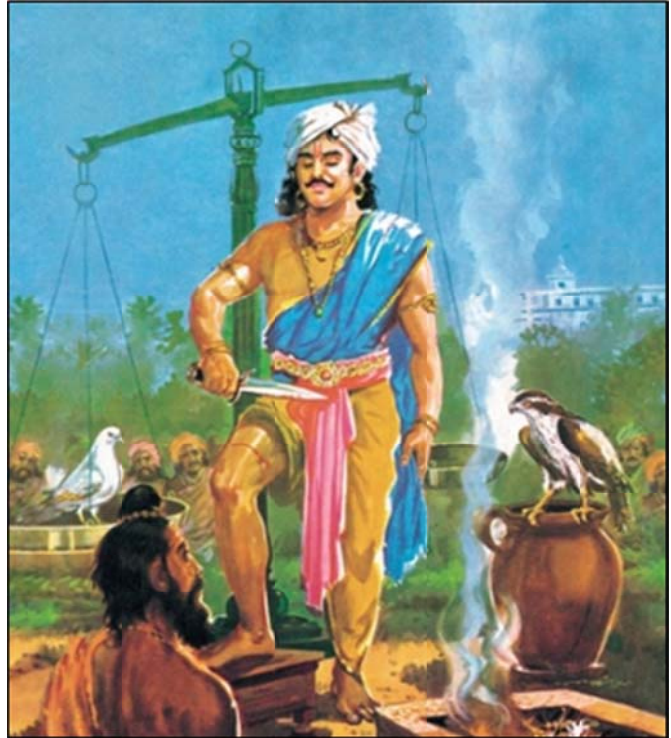
3.3 The Sacrifice of King Shibi

King Shibi ruled the kingdom of Ushīnara (modern Kangra and Hoshiarpur areas of India). One day, he was performing a grand yajna. Indra and Agni decided to test him. They respectively assumed the form of a hawk and a dove. The hawk started chasing the dove to kill it and eat it. Terrified, the dove landed into the lap of King Shibi and asked him to protect it from the hawk's attack.

The hawk on the other hand countered, "This dove is my food. Therefore King, you cannot snatch my food from me by offering protection to his dove."

King Shibi said, "There is no greater Dharma than to offer protection to a creature whose life is in danger. As a King, it is my duty to protect the weak. All other Dharmas are minor compared to risking one's own life to protect the innocent."

The hawk replied, "But your Dharma is depriving me of its food. If you do not want to release this dove, which is my food, then give me some other meat. I eat only meat."



The King replied, "Well, in that case I will cut my own flesh and offer it to you."

A weighing balance was procured. The pigeon sat on one of the pans. King Shibi started cutting flesh from his own hands and legs and placed it on the other pan. Unfortunately, the pigeon seemed unusually heavy. The King commented, "As a King, I am blessed if my entire body can be used to save the life of someone else. What is the use of my riches if I cannot protect my subjects?"

Saying this, as everyone looked in horror, he sat himself on the other pan. Instantly, the two pans weighed equal!

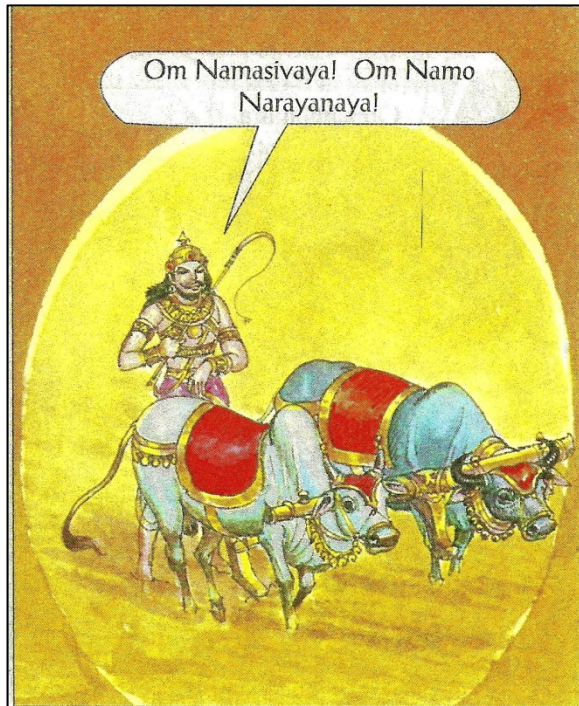
The hawk and the dove assumed their real forms as Indra and Agni. Indra blessed Shibi and said, "We had come here to test you. Despite great challenges and personal sacrifices, you did not deter from the main duty of a King, which is to protect his weaker subjects from the atrocities of the more powerful. In your life, you have never been jealous of the powerful, and have never insulted the weak. And now, you were ready to give up your own life for a humble bird. Great men like you deserve to be in heaven after their earthly life is over."

King Shibi ruled as a just King for several years. After his death, his soul reached heaven. *The story of King Shibi shows how the great Hindu emperors in ancient India did not hesitate to give up their own life to protect every creature in their kingdom because they considered it their duty.*

Discussion: Have you ever stood up for someone who was being bullied? How did you help that person?

3.4 Emperor Kuru: How Kurukshetra got its name

King Kuru of the Puru-Bharata dynasty ruled a kingdom on the banks of Sarasvati River, which flowed in northern India at the border of the Indian states of Haryana and Punjab. One day, his elderly prime minister asked permission to retire and settle down in Varanasi, on the banks of Ganga. When the King asked for a reason, he replied, "Varanasi is a very holy city and Ganga washes away our sins. It is said that Bhagavān Shiva grants Moksha¹⁶ to whosoever dies there. Therefore, please permit me to leave your kingdom."



The King thought, "What can I do to make my kingdom as holy as Varanasi, so that my people do not have to travel this long distance for Moksha? After all, isn't Sarasvati River also a very holy river?" He called a meeting of his ministers and asked them for a solution. Many of them discouraged him from making any attempt in this regard. Some of them suggested that he should talk to Rishis who lived in the forests on the banks of Kurukshetra.

The King approached the Rishis. They said to him, "Let us warn you that to make this place as holy as Varanasi is a very difficult task. You must pray to Shiva and Yama – the Lord of Death, to suggest a way." But King Kuru was not dissuaded. He said, "Bhagiratha and his ancestors too worked very hard to get Ganga from the heaven to this earth. I too am very determined to make my kingdom as holy as Varanasi." The Rishis blessed him, and the King started worshipping and meditating on Shiva and Yama.

They were pleased, and granted a wish to King Kuru. The King said, "I request Bhagavān Shiva to loan me his bull Nandi, and Yama to loan me his buffalo. I will till the plains of my kingdom with these two divine animals, and this will surely make it very holy." Shiva and Yama loaned their mounts to King Kuru, who became a farmer and started tilling the land with great effort, while chanting, "Om Namashivaaya, Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya."

After many years of efforts, he tilled the entire land in his kingdom. Then he worshipped Bhagavān Vishnu to ask him what should be done next. Vishnu answered King Kuru's prayers and said, "You have scratched off all evil from this land by ploughing it with Nandi and the buffalo of Yama. But you must also now plant the seeds of Dharma to make it holy. No one is as Dhārmic as you King Kuru, because you have worked hard unselfishly for the sake of your own people. Will you agree to become the seed for sowing?" King Kuru replied, "Bhagavān, what can make me happier than becoming the seed that will make the land of my people prosperous and holy?"

Bhagavān Vishnu then transformed the body of King Kuru into a heap of grain, and then sprinkled



¹⁶ Hindu Dharma teaches us that after our death, we are reborn. We have also lived several lives before our present life. Every life has a mixture of happiness and sadness. We can be free of all sadness and sorrows only if we come out of this continuous cycle of birth-death-birth-death-birth-death....by becoming united with Bhagavān. When this happens, we are not born again, and live in ever-lasting happiness with Bhagavān. Freedom from unhappiness, and from the continuous cycle of births and deaths is called 'Moksha', which means 'liberation' or 'freedom.'

the seeds all over the land. When abundant crops had grown in the land, Vishnu then summoned the soul of King Kuru and granted him a wish. King Kuru's soul replied, "Please make this land as holy as Varanasi, and let it hereafter be known as Kurukshetra." Bhagavān Vishnu granted his wishes.

Even today, Hindus often visit Kurukshetra for worship and prayer, and perform the funeral ceremonies of their dead ancestors in that area in the hope that Bhagavān will bless their souls. Sometime later, Bhagavān Krishna too appeared in Kurukshetra and revealed to his friend Arjuna the Bhagavad Gita, a holiest Hindu scripture.

King Kuru's life teaches us how one should not hesitate to even give up every bit of our body in the service of others. By making a sacrifice without selfish desires, we can benefit others and earn the blessings of Bhagavān for ourselves.

3.5 Pareekshit

About 3500 years ago in India, a great war was fought between two groups of cousins – the five Pāṇḍava brothers, and 100 Kaurava brothers. The war was fought with 4 million soldiers in a place called Kurukshetra, about 100 miles north of New Delhi, the capital of India. The Pāṇḍavas won the war, but all their children were killed. Only their grandson Pareekshit, who was born right after the war, survived. The Pāṇḍava brothers took great care that Pareekshit grew up to be a wise, educated and a virtuous Prince.

Yudhishtira, who was the eldest Pāṇḍava brother, ruled for more than 30 years. Then, all the five brothers decided to hand over their kingdom to Pareekshit, and they went to heaven.

Pareekshit became the Emperor of India after the Pāṇḍava princes retired. He was a very fair and just ruler. He made sure that there were no thieves and murderers in his kingdom. No one in his country went hungry. The rains came on time. He gave lots of donations to learned men and fed the poor. Everyone was happy in his kingdom and they thanked Bhagavān for making Pareekshit their king.



One day, on a hot summer day, Pareekshit went for hunting. After pursuing wild deer for several hours, he became very tired and searched for some water. Suddenly, he saw a small hut. He thought that the owner of the hut might have some water. When he entered the hut, he saw Rishi Shamika inside. The Rishi was meditating, with his eyes shut and his mind thinking of Bhagavān. Obviously, Shamika did not notice the king arrive.

Pareekshit asked Rishi Shamika for some water. But the Rishi was lost deep in meditation and did not hear him. Pareekshit felt insulted and he became very angry. He said, "How dare you ignore your own King? I will teach you a lesson!" Pareekshit looked around and found a dead snake in the grass. He picked the snake with his bow, and put it around the neck of Shamika, who was still meditating. Some students of the Rishi who were playing outside the

hut saw this. They were shocked. They rushed to Shringi, the son of Shamika, and told him everything. Meanwhile, Pareekshit left for his palace.

When Shringi arrived and saw the dead snake around his father's neck, he too became very angry. Now, Shringi was also a great Rishi. The words of a Rishi always come true. Therefore, he now cursed Pareekshit, "Seven days from now, a flying snake will bite you to death." After a few moments, Rishi Shamika came out of his meditation. When he heard what his son had done, he scolded him, "Shringi, what was the need to curse a great king like

Pareekshit? He did not do anything that hurt me or harmed me. Rishis should learn to control their anger. What you did was very wrong.” Rishi Shringi now felt very guilty, but he could not take back the curse.

Meanwhile, Pareekshit felt very sorry about what he had done to Rishi Shamika. He thought, “I have always loved everyone. I have always respected Rishis and Pundits. Why did I do such a wicked deed today? May be I was irritated because I was thirsty. But even then, I should not have gotten angry at Rishi Shamika. I am sure he did not hear me because he in deep meditation. Now, what can I do to get punishment for my evil deed, which I did because I did not control my anger?”

Shamika sent a messenger to Pareekshit to inform him that his son had cursed the king to die after seven days of a snake-bite. When Pareekshit heard of this, he sent his apologies to Sage Shamika. Then he thought, “I do deserve this punishment. It serves me right. I will now leave my palace and go to the banks of river Ganga. There, I will spend the remaining seven days of my life in worshipping Bhagavān Vishnu and will wait for my death.”

Pareekshit listened to stories of Vishnu for seven days. Then, a snake came and bit him, and he died. But having listened to the inspiring story of Vishnu, he embraced death with a smile. Because, he knew that his death would lead him to immortality. The story of Pareekshit shows how even good people can behave very badly when they get angry. Therefore, we should try to control our anger at every time.



Practical Methods of Overcoming Anger

1. Take deep breaths. Sometimes, we get angry in a hurry because we have studied the situation carefully before blaming someone else quickly. Therefore, taking deep breaths gives us some extra time to think it over, and also relaxes our agitated mind and heart.
2. Think over the issue again to determine if you have become angry in haste. Try to study yourself and see if you are angry because you are tired or hungry, and not because the other person is at fault.
3. Start doing something different, or think something else. This will divert your mind and your anger will wear off after some time.
4. Drink a glass of cold water, or take a cold shower. Sometimes, we get angry because of the uncomfortable environment around us – too high humidity or temperature, thirst or hunger. These factors make us irritable.



Therefore, try to make yourself more comfortable by quenching your thirst etc., and you will feel better.

5. Go to an empty room and sit alone for some time. Getting away from the scene that caused you anger can be beneficial. In solitude, you can just vent your anger at yourself, instead of directing it towards others.

6. Take some rest. Eat something.

7. If the anger is towards a person, then think of the times when he/she has done good things to you. Use these more pleasant memories to forgive that person.

8. When vicious and evil people make us angry, practice indifference (‘upekshā’) towards them. Just ignore them.

Abraham Lincoln suggested a very practical way of controlling one’s anger. He said that whenever we get angry, we should write down in a letter why and on why we got angry. But we should not mail that letter. Instead,

when the mind gets calm, read that letter and reflect whether it was OK to have got angry, and whether the person to whom the anger was directed has any positive qualities. Reflect whether that person committed the mistake that made you angry out of any genuine reason. You will realize that in most cases, your anger was not justified, and would have been an impulsive act that you could have taken without looking at the situation from all angles.

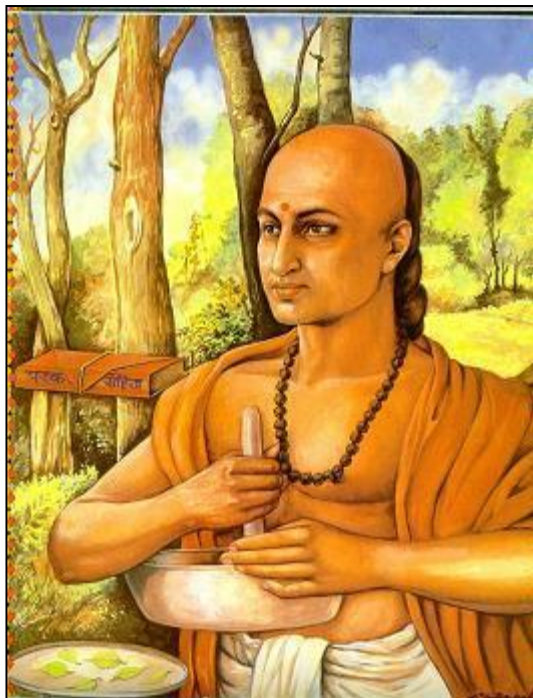
Further Research

When King Pareekshit was still in his mother's womb, an enemy named Ashvatthāmā tried to kill him. How was his life saved then? And after Pareekshit died of the snake bite, how did his son Janamejaya take revenge for his father's murder?

4. Hindu Physicians, Veterinarians, Botanists, Environmentalists

Hindu Medicine: In the Atharvaveda, there are around 1000 verses that deal with medicine. Ancient physicians in India wrote several books on medicine covering different branches like surgery, pediatrics (medicine of children) and so on. The Hindu science of medicine is called 'Āyurveda', which means the 'science of life'.

4.1 Charaka, the Ancient Hindu Physician



According to the Hindu tradition, Agnivesha taught the principles of Hindu medicine to his several students who then wrote their own textbooks. One of these students was Charaka, whose work called the Charaka Samhitā is still studied by thousands of scholars who practice Āyurveda. Amazingly, in his book on medicine, Charaka declares that many diseases are caused by creatures who are very minute in size and can therefore be seen only with the help of a 'yantra' (instrument), just like we can see disease causing bacteria and viruses today only with the help of a microscope. Charaka also described how hospitals should be constructed properly for speedy and comfortable treatment and recovery of patients. For example, he recommended that rooms should be cooled during summer months, and heated during the winter.

He also taught that it is very important to live a healthy lifestyle, eat a balanced diet, exercise properly and live in clean surroundings. Most people think about medicine only when they are sick. But Charaka, much like modern physicians, believed that a healthy lifestyle will greatly decrease our chances of falling sick. The story below in this regard is very interesting.

Story: Who is free of Disease?

Charaka Muni compiled a marvelous book on Ayurveda (Hindu medicine) in which he described hundreds of diseases, their cures, healthy lifestyles etc. Sometime after he released his book, he decided to find out if people were becoming healthier and living longer due to his efforts. Therefore, he took the form of a speaking parrot.

The parrot alighted on the branch of a tree at the center of a marketplace where a great conference of physicians was going on. The parrot started shouting, "koraruk?" (meaning "who does not become sick?" in Sanskrit). All the physicians heard the parrot's cry. All tried to answer the question to demonstrate who was more knowledgeable in Ayurveda.

The first physician replied, "Only he who eats the nutritious supplement called 'chyavanaprāsha' stays healthy." The second physician retorted, "No, you are wrong! It is the ash of burnt metals mixed with the blue berry that keeps the stomach healthy." The third physician said, "Of course not! One must eat the Chandraprabhāvatī to fight sickness." And the fourth disagreed with all the three and recommended the Ashvagandhā mixture.

Their answers really disappointed Charaka. He flew away, thinking, "I did not compile my book on Āyurveda to make every human being's stomach a warehouse of medicines!" He went around and asked the same question. "koraruk," to every physician he had met, but got similar disappointing replies.

Finally, he sat on a tree below which was sitting a famous physician Vāgbhatta, who had just taken his bath. "Koraruk?" asked the parrot. Vāgbhatta was really amused to see a parrot say a question that is so important to physicians. And he replied, "hitabhuk (he who eats only those foods which benefit our body), mitabhuk (he who eats only controlled amounts of food), ritabhuk (he who is not a slave to taste, and does not fill his stomach with junk food)." When the parrot heard the reply, "hitabhuk, mitabhuk, ritabhuk," he was very pleased. Charaka Muni now

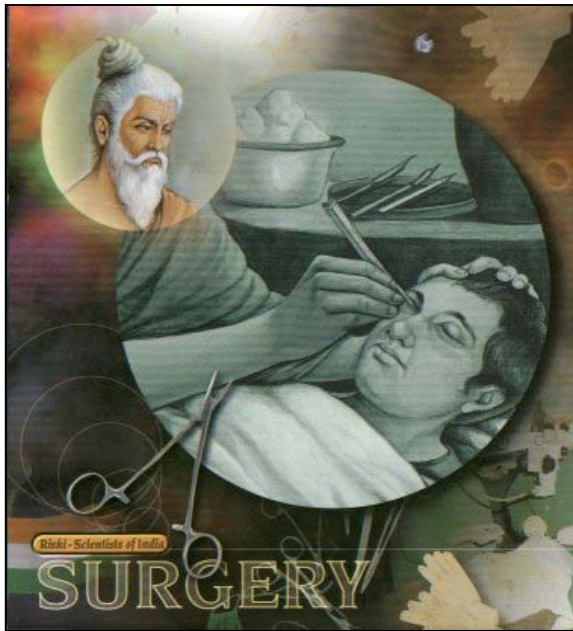
assumed his normal human form and appeared in front of Vāgbhatta. “You alone have understood the secret of medicine, dear Vāgbhatta.”

The moral of the story is that instead of stuffing our body with medicines, supplements, we should rather eat a healthy and a controlled diet. We should eat to live, not live to eat!

Class Exercise 1

In the table below, can you match the junk food in the left column to the diseases or health problems that it can cause in the right column? Ask an elder what the words in the right column mean. Some junk foods can lead to more than one type of health problems.

<u>Junk Food</u>	<u>Health Problem</u>
Candy	Heartburn
Very spicy food	Obesity
Lots of deep fried food (e.g. French fries)	Tooth cavities
Soda (aerated canned drinks)	Heart problems
Wine	Cancer
Cigarettes	High blood pressure/headache



like eye surgery, delivering a child by C-Section, treatment of wounded soldiers and even amputation of limbs to prevent the spread of disease.

- It also describes the use of anesthetic materials during surgery so that the patient does not feel pain while he is being operated upon.

4.2 Sushruta, the Ancient Hindu Surgeon:

Ancient India also had very renowned surgeons. The Atharva Veda, which is one of the four Vedas, describes some methods of surgery on humans and animals. Around 1000 BCE, Divodāsa, the King of Kāshī in northern India, taught his students the various principles of surgery in a systematic manner. His student Sushruta then wrote a book called the Sushruta Samhitā that is studied even today. How advanced the surgical practices in Āyurveda were can be understood from the following facts:

- Several surgical instruments used by Āyurvedic surgeons in ancient India were identical or similar to what modern surgeons use today.
- Sushruta Samhitā describes several complex surgeries



- Sushruta Samhitā also correctly describes how diseases can result from a variety of causes like genetics (inheritance from parents), poor diet and lifestyle, and even due to bad karma of previous lives.

A report by Europeans written in 1792 CE described how plastic surgery was used by Hindu physicians to rebuild the nose of a cart-driver whose nose had been cut by soldiers of an enemy state. It was only several decades later that western surgeons could practice plastic surgery.

4.3 Jeevaka, the Physician of Bhagavān Buddha



The town of Takshashilā, founded by Taksha, the nephew of Bhagavān Rama, came to have a renowned university after several centuries. One of the subjects it became famous for was Āyurveda, the system of Hindu medicine. A renowned teacher in that school was Brihaspati. One day, he decided to test his favorite student Jeevaka. He summoned him and said to him, “I will give you a spade. Within a radius of 5 miles, find a plant that has no medicinal value and bring it to me.”

Jeevaka left and returned to his teacher empty handed. He said, “Gurudeva, there is no plant that is useless from a medicinal point of view. Every plant can be used to derive some medical benefit or the other.” Brihaspati was

very pleased and said, “You have truly understood the heart of Ayurveda. There is no herb in this world that will not yield some medical benefit. Rather, there is a shortage of scholars who can evaluate the true worth of these herbs. I want you to graduate today because I am confident that you will make a great physician.”

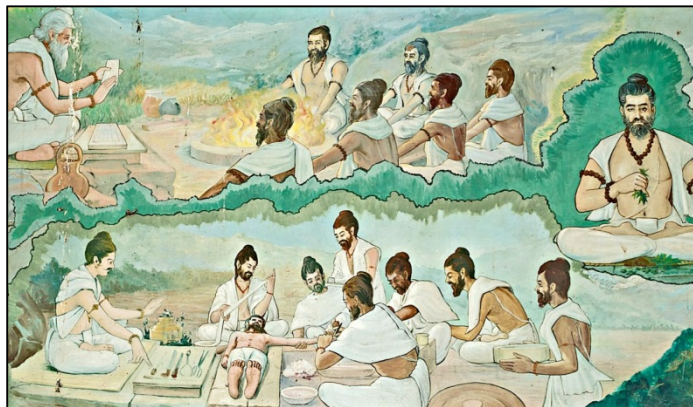
Brihaspati’s prediction came true. Jeevaka eventually became the physician of none other than Bhagavān Buddha as well as of King Bimbisāra of the Magadha kingdom. He also wrote a book on medicine that focused on treating kids. A portion of that book survives even today and is called Vriddha-Jeevakiya Tantra.

4.4 Vāgbhatta

In the 8th century, a scholar of Āyurveda decided to combine several existing textbooks (including those of Charaka and Sushruta) into one textbook. He wrote a book called ‘Ashtānga Hridaya’ that contains instructions on surgery, as well as other methods and techniques of Hindu medicine. The story below shows how his Guru Dhanvantari took great trouble to make Vāgbhatta an expert at Hindu medicine

Story: Guru Dhanvantari suffers to make Vāgbhatta a better Āyurveda scholar

One day, Dhanvantari got a boil on his back. He summoned his favorite student Vāgbhatta and said, “My boil can be cured with the help of an herb found in the forest close by. I will describe that herb to you. Go to the forest and fetch that herb.”



Vāgbhatta left for the forest, where he kept searching for the herb his Guru had described. He did not find the herb although he kept searching for three months. However, in his search process, he was able to study hundreds of other plants very closely. He returned to his Guru and told him of the failure of his search. Dhanvantari asked him to describe the herbs he had looked at, and their properties.

As the student described the hundreds of herbs that he had seen and studied, the Guru's eyes gleamed with joy. He then took Vāgbhatta to a nearby field and found the herb promptly. A paste of the herb was applied, and Dhanvantari's boil healed. After a few days, Vāgbhatta asked him, "If the herb grows so close in the field, why did you send me to the forest? You would not have suffered all this time had you told me where it grows."

Dhanvantari replied, "You are my most promising student. I deliberately sent you to the forest because I knew that you will research numerous other herbs and get some idea of their medicinal uses. For that purpose, I was willing to bear the pain from my boil for a few months."

Did you know?

Hippocrates, a Greek physician who lived from 430 – 370 BCE is said to be the father of modern medicine. But we see that Hindu physicians had developed medicine and surgery to much greater levels several centuries earlier in India and Pakistan. Hippocrates had written an oath that all new physicians had to take before they started practicing medicine as a profession. Modified versions of his oath are still used in many medical schools all over the world. However, some scholars believe that the oaths given in the books of Āyurveda are better, and that these books of ancient Hindu medicine are more detailed and accurate than that of Hippocrates. Don't you think that it is the duty of Hindus to make others aware of the advances in medicine that our ancestors had made?

4.5 Hindu Veterinarians

Many animals were first domesticated by the Hindus. In the Saraswati-Sindhu civilization (commonly called the Harappan culture or incorrectly as the Indus Valley Civilization), archaeologists have found a few seals showing decorated elephants that were perhaps a part of a procession. Interestingly, archaeologists found an ancient manual of chariot racing in a country named Syria in the Middle East, which is a few thousand miles away from India. This manual is older than 1500 BCE. The interesting thing to note is that many terms used in this book are from the Sanskrit language.



Foreign travelers who visited India more than 1000 years ago noted that Hindus, Jains and Buddhists had opened hospitals even for the treatment of animals.

There were at least five manuals on horses in ancient India describing the types of horses, proper diet, curing illness in horses and so on. One of these manuals on horses is said to have been written by Nakula, one of the Pāṇḍava brothers. The picture on the left shows the page from a manuscript showing eye surgery being performed on a horse.

Another veterinarian named Shālīhotra wrote several books on veterinary science of horses. These books were later translated into many languages like Arabic, Persian and Tibetan.

A Rishi named Pālākāpya who lived in Assam in eastern India many centuries ago also wrote a book called 'Gajāyurveda' dealing with diseases of elephants. In fact, there was no similar book on this topic in the entire world till the 19th century! Scholars of Gajāyurveda in Kerala in southern India still use this book for the treatment of elephants.

4.5 Plant Doctors and Botanists

The following crops were first grown by Hindus: Sugarcane, Lemons, some varieties of rice, cotton, cucumbers. Can you imagine your life without these foods and cloth fibers today? The oldest books on the science of agriculture in the world were written by Hindu scholars. Some of them like the Krishi Parāshara exist even today.

Surapāla, a plant doctor who lived in the 10th century CE wrote a book called Vrikshāyurveda. In this book, he described things like:

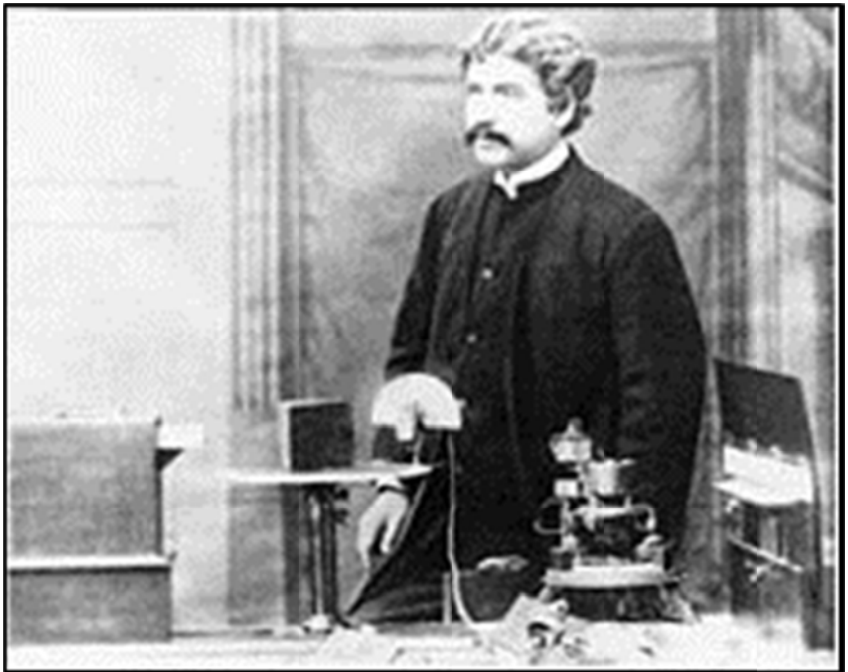
- Collecting, selecting and storing good seeds
- Process of sowing seeds
- Process of germination
- Testing and classification of different types of soils, and which type of soil is suitable for particular plants
- Controlling pests that harm plants
- Fertilizers to improve the growth of plants.

Another scholar named Parāshara wrote his book called 'Krishi Parāshara' explaining how to improve the yields of food by practicing agriculture scientifically.

4.5.1 (Sir) Jagdish Chandra Bose (1858 – 1937): Proving that Plants have life

Hindus were the first people to believe that plants are also living beings. The rest of the world till recently thought that plants were non-living. This ancient Hindu belief inspired Dr. Jagdish Chandra Bose to invent an instrument called the Crescograph.

Born in Bikrampur (close to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh), Jagdish Chandra Bose is considered the father of experimental science in India, and was the first individual in the Indian subcontinent to be awarded an American patent. IEEE, the premier world organization on electrical engineering and electronics, has designated him as one of the fathers of radio science.



One of his notable inventions was the Crescograph, which detected response to stimuli in plants, thereby proving the Hindu belief that plants are also living organisms. The instrument also showed how plants felt pain, and how they tremble when they are injured.

4.6 Guru Jambheshwar (1451 – 1536 CE), the world's first environmentalist

Mother earth has a limited amount of water, soil to grow crops, plants, animals, metals and other resources for use by humans. Many of us waste these gifts of nature and also pollute our surroundings. An environmentalist is a person who studies the harmful effects of our activities on our surroundings, and teaches others how we can avoid wasting or polluting natural resources like water. Interestingly, one of the earliest environmentalists in the world was a Hindu saint named Jambhoji (also called Guru Jambheshwar).

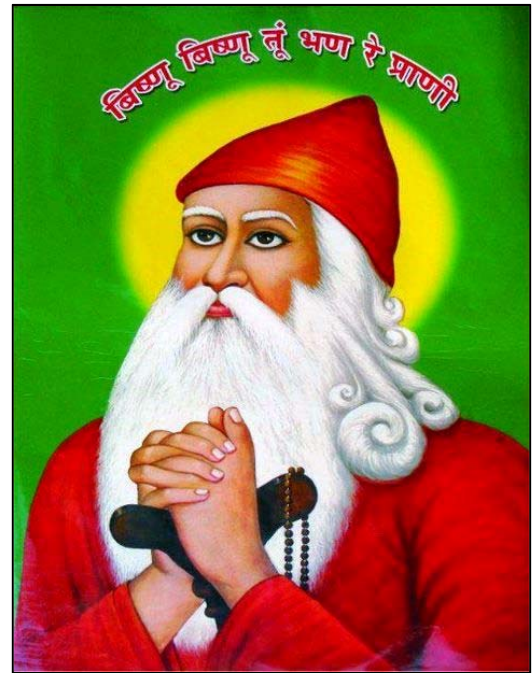
He was born in 1451 at Pipasar in Rajasthan (India). The area is a desert, and trees as well as natural wildlife are scarce. In 1485, the area was hit with a very bad drought. People started fleeing the area with their cattle. Till then, Jambhoji made a living grazing his family's cattle. He decided to help people affected by famine. He arranged for food grain, hay for cattle and fertilizers for agriculture. With his help, many people were able to stay back in their homes. Jambhoji realized that droughts happened not only because of low rainfall, but also because people were not taking care of their environment. They were cutting down trees for firewood and for wasteful activities. They killed the

domestic and wild animals unnecessarily for cruel sports like hunting. They were wasting water. As a result, when rains failed to come, the people of that area had nothing to survive with. Therefore, in that year, he performed a havan (a Vedic religious ceremony) and announced 29 rules. His followers therefore came to be known as 'bishnoi' which means 'they who follow 29 rules.'

These rules teach us how to live as a good human being, be neat and clean, be devoted to Bhagavān Vishnu, help others and most importantly, preserve our environment. For examples, these rules say that we must not hunt or kill animals for food or sport, we must not fell green trees, be vegetarians, not hurt dairy cattle in any way etc. The ancient Vedic scriptures regarded the black antelope (called 'black-buck') as a sacred animal. The Bishnois too forbade the killing of this animal. Further, the Khejari tree that grew widely in that area and provided food for animals was declared as sacred, and no one was allowed to fell these trees.

Thanks to the efforts of Jambhoji Maharaj (who lived for 51 years after teaching these rules), large parts of the desert area became green with trees, and populated with wild animals once again. The following incident, that happened almost 200 years after Guru Jambheshwar's lifetime shows how dedicated his followers were.

In 1730, the Rājput Maharaja of a kingdom named Jodhpur wanted wood for constructing his palace. He sent his prime minister and some soldiers to obtain wood from a Bishnoi village named Khejarli, because the Bishnoi villages had plenty of trees. However, a woman named Amrita Devi Bishnoi stopped the king's men saying, "These trees are sacred to us. We will not allow you to cut them even if you chop off our heads! The prime minister did not want to return to Jodhpur empty handed. He ordered the soldiers to behead Amrita Devi. Then, her three daughters came forward and said, "You might have killed our mother, but we are not scared. You will have to cut our heads too before you can touch these trees." Unfortunately, the cruel soldiers killed the three girls too. One after another, men, women and children of the Bishnoi community of that village came out to offer their lives. In the next several hours, 363 people



preferred to get beheaded rather than allow the soldiers to cut their trees. When the shocking news reached the Maharaja, he was filled with remorse and apologized to the community. He issued a royal order that henceforth, trees will not be cut in the Bishnoi villages. Even today, the massacre is remembered on its anniversary every year and people from far away areas come to the village for the function. The government of India gives an award named 'Amrita Devi Bishnoi Award'

every year to a person who has contributed a lot for protection of nature and wildlife.

Why is the Khejri tree holy to the Bishnois? The bark of this tree can be used for treating illness like asthma and common cold. Its flowers are mixed with sugar and given to pregnant mothers so that their baby is born healthy. The roots of this tree are very deep and they prevent soil from being blown away by the wind. Also, the tree traps nitrogen from air and stores it in the soil, which then adds as a fertilizer for the crops that farmers grow.

4.7 The Chipko Movement: Tree Hugging in Uttarakhand, India



When trees are cut in mountainous regions, the soil on their slopes becomes loose. Therefore, when it rains, the soil gets washed away. As a result, all fertile land loses its soil and crops do not grow well on it. This leads to a shortage of food. Landslides, in which the weak sides of a mountain come crashing down (often killing people) become more frequent. When a mountain crumbles and crashes into a river full of water, it leads to dangerous floods. This is what had happened in the early 19th century in the hilly state of Uttarakhand in northern India. More than 95% of the population of this area is Hindu.

Finally, fed up of endless cutting of trees by wood-traders, the villagers of Uttarakhand started the 'Chipko Movement.' This movement was largely led by women in the beginning. Whenever tree loggers showed up to cut down trees, groups of women would hug trees. The first major tree hugging protest happened in 1974. Village after village adopted trees as their friends, and started hugging ('chipko') them to prevent them from being cut down. Men and women, children

and adults all started participating in this protest.

Eventually, the government passed an order that for the next several years, no tree would be cut in the entire region. The result was that after fifteen years, Uttarakhand once again became forested and happy. The Chipko movement of Uttarakhand has inspired many other 'Tree Hugger' movements by environmentalists all over the world.



Class Discussion

1. Discuss three ways in which you can save water in your daily life.
2. Do you think that when you keep your surroundings clean, you also protect your environment?

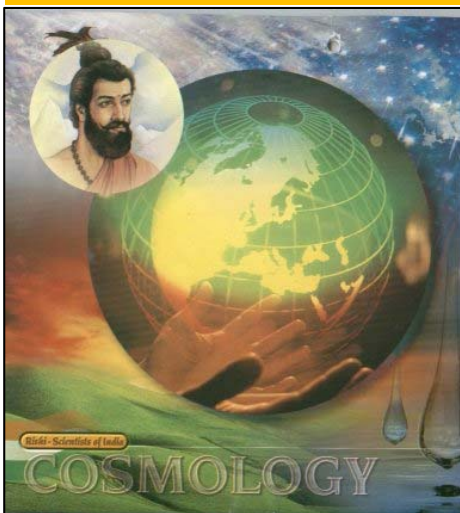
5. Ancient Hindu Philosophers, Scientists, Engineers & Mathematicians

5.0 The Difference between the history of Hindu Science and Western Science

In the western world, science and religion were seen as being in conflict with each other. Many European scientists were threatened with death by the Christian church if they did not give up teaching their scientific discoveries. Even today, many Christians believe that scientific theories about the origin of this world and human life are false because they are different from the teachings of the Bible. Similar has often been the case in the Islamic countries. However, science and religion were often treated as two sides of the same coin in Hindu cultures. The greatest advances in science in the Hindu society were made at the same time as the greatest advancement in religious ideas. Many Hindu scientists, mathematicians and engineers were and are even today very firm believers in Hindu Dharma. In ancient times, the same Rishis who wrote our scriptures also often wrote books on science.

But, there is one important difference between the final goal of Western science and that of Hindu science. Western science has no interest in teaching about God, religion or spirituality. Its goal is to understand the nature of this physical universe made of matter, its chemistry, physics, and natural laws and so on. On the other hand, ancient Hindu scientists felt that understanding the nature of this universe helps us in understanding Bhagavān, because it is He who has made this universe. It is for this reason that many simple scientific facts related to arithmetic and biology are stated also in the Vedas, which are the oldest scriptures of the Hindus. Therefore, according to Hindu Dharma, the final goal of studying the universe scientifically is to know Bhagavān, and to understand the nature of our own soul (ātman).

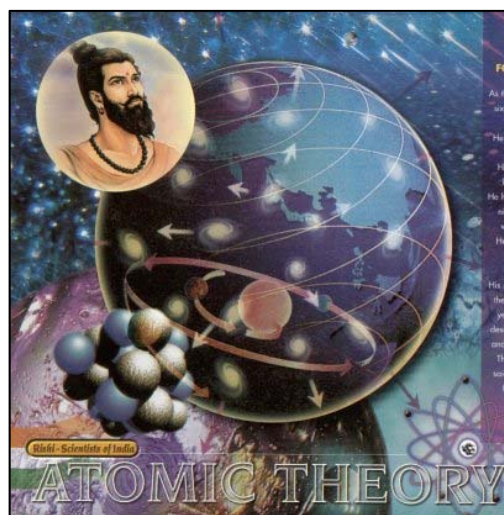
5.1 Rishi Kapila and Rishi Kaṇāda



Two Hindu philosophies that deal with the nature of the universe as well as with the nature of the soul are Sāmkhya Darshana and the Vaisheshika Darshana. They were first taught by Rishi Kapila and Rishi Kaṇāda respectively.

Rishi Kapila taught that this universe is made of two different things – the souls, and matter. The soul and matter can never convert into each other. Matter keeps changing its properties with time, but the soul does not change at all. Both of them are eternal. The soul gives life to living beings, and matter gives it a form and shape. However,

some types of matter (like air) have no form or shape. Rishi Kapila and his students taught that the soul is reborn when it dies because it does not know that it is different from matter. When the soul understands the difference between itself and matter, and is able to see this difference with the help of yoga, then it becomes free and does not have to go through rebirth.





Rishi Kaṇāda said that all matter is made of one or more these five substances: Akāsha (space); Agni (Energy); Vāyu (gases like air); Āpah (liquids like water); Prithivi (solids like earth). Of these, the last four are comprised of ‘Paramāṇus’ (atoms). The soul (ātman) is different from matter.

It is interesting that a Greek philosopher named Democritus (460 – 370 BCE) who lived a few centuries later also stated a similar theory. However, it was more than 2000 years later when John Dalton (1766 – 1844 CE), an English scientist, described the atoms in a detailed, scientific manner. The ideas of Democritus were never accepted by Christianity and Islam. However, the atomic theory of Vaisheshika Darshana became a part of Hindu Dharma in some way or the

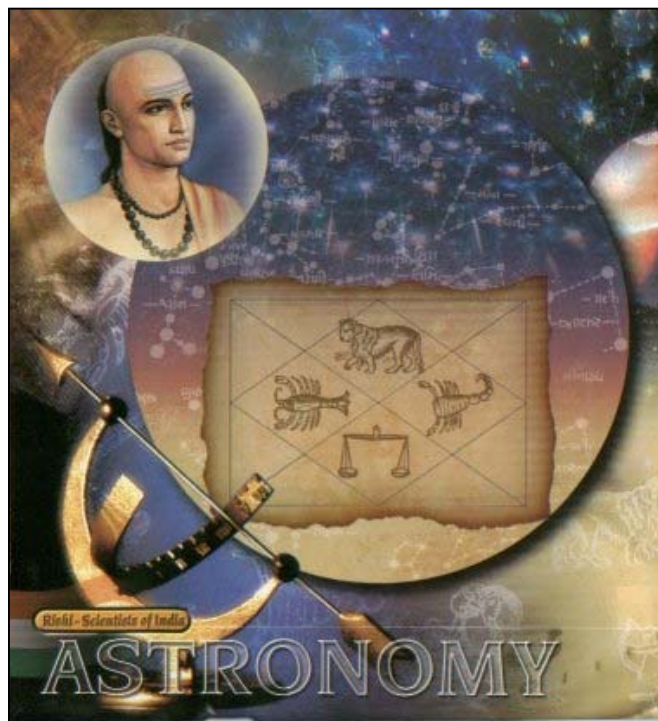
other since very ancient times. This is another example that explains why there has never been a serious disagreement between Hindu beliefs and science in history.

This does not mean that there are no disagreements at all between Hindu beliefs and science. We can give the example of astrology, according to which the position of stars at the time of one’s birth can be used to predict his or her future. In the past as well as in modern times, many Hindus have both believed and not believed in astronomy. Especially today, many Hindus believe that astrology is unscientific.

5.2 Astronomers Aryabhatta and Varāhamihira

It is not known exactly what part of India Āryabhatta came from. However, it is known that he was born in 476 CE and became the dean of a university. In his book on mathematics and astronomy titled as ‘Āryabhattīya’ gives some amazing facts that are confirmed by modern science:

- In geometry, a number called ‘pi’ is used to calculate the circumference of a circle and so on. Āryabhatta gives the value of ‘pi’ quite accurately as 3.1416
- He states correctly that the moon has no light of its own, and shines due to the light of the sun reflecting from its surface. He also explained that a lunar eclipse occurs when the earth comes between the sun and the moon, due to which the moon becomes completely dark.
- He calculated that the earth rotates on its axis in 23 hrs., 56 mins and 45.1 seconds which is very close to the modern calculation of 23 hours, 56 minutes and 45.091 seconds!
- He gave a ‘sine table’ that is useful in trigonometry, a branch of mathematics.
- Unlike other astronomers who believed that the sun went around the earth, he stated correctly that it is the earth which revolves around the sun. Unfortunately, our books on science still state incorrectly that the European astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 – 1543 CE) was the first scientist who said that the earth revolves around the sun (and not the other way around) when in-fact Copernicus lived 1000 years after Āryabhatta.



Another great scholar who lived in central India in the city of Ujjain from 499 – 587 CE was Varāhamihira. He wrote several books on astronomy and astrology as well as one of the world oldest encyclopedias in 4000 verses. This encyclopedia is called Brihatsamhitā. In this book, he gives a lot of information about astronomy, architecture, geography, botany, science of precious stones, manufacture of perfumes and cosmetics and so on.

An astonishing fact that he states correctly in his works is that the earth is spherical. Although today, no one questions this fact, most people in the world thought that the world was a flat disc till just a few centuries ago. For example, when Christopher Columbus set sail from Europe in search of a sea route to India (although he eventually landed in North America in 1492), many Church leaders still believed that if he sailed too far west, his ship would fall off the edge of the earth! But in many Vedic scriptures (as well as in the works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle in the 4th cent. BCE) and then in Varāhamihira's work written almost 1000 years before Columbus, it had been stated correctly that the earth is a sphere.

Did you know? Jantar Mantars

Raja Sawai Jai Singh (1688 – 1743 CE), the Raja of Jaipur in India was so intelligent and learned that it was said he had not just one brain like us, but a little more because 'sawā' means 1.25 (one and a quarter). He studied the ancient Hindu astronomy and also obtained books related to Arabic and European astronomy of his times. Using all this knowledge, he had constructed 5 giant observatories for studying astronomy. These observatories are called Jantar Mantars, and were constructed in the following five cities in the early 18th century: Delhi, Jaipur, Varanasi, Ujjain and Mathura. Some of these still survive and many tourists visit them even today.



Sunita Williams and Kalpana Chawla: Hindu American Astronauts

The first two Hindus who became American astronauts were Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams (picture on the right). Kalpana was born in Rohtak (India) and was not a particularly religious Hindu, but like Sunita, she preferred vegetarian food. Sunita Pandya Williams was born to a Hindu father and a European Christian mother in Euclid, Ohio (USA). After she returned to the earth from her space flight on June 22, 2007, she gave interviews saying that she had taken a copy of the Bhagavad Gita and a murti of Ganesha with her into the space.

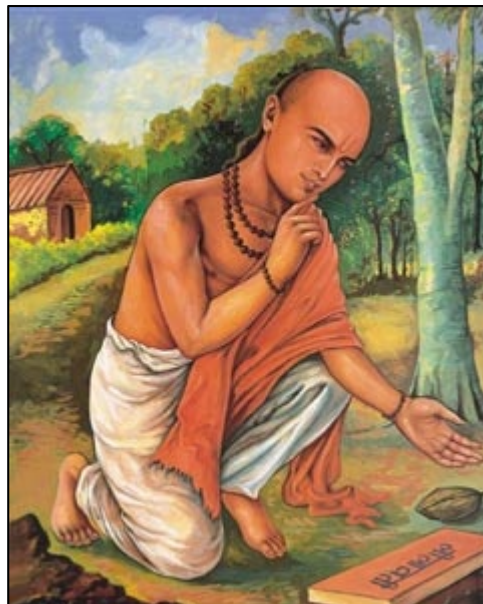
She said in an interview that she felt very confident while in the space because she knew that Ganesha was looking after her. She also got a lot of mental strength reading the Gita while her Space Shuttle *Discovery* was circling the earth in space. Just before *Discovery* took off from the earth, Sunita Williams called her family and friends and greeted them by saying 'Namaste.'



5.3 Mathematician Bhāskara (1114 – 1185 CE) and his daughter Līlāvati

In the 12th century CE, there lived in India a great mathematician named Bhāskara. He was born in a family of mathematicians in Bijapur in the Indian state of Karnataka, but spent most of his life in other towns like Ujjain in central India. His son and grandson also became great mathematicians. He was also a great astrologer and a Bhakta of Shiva.

He had a lovely daughter named Līlāvati whom he taught mathematics and astrology with great affection. He named the first section of his most famous book on mathematics after his daughter Līlāvati. In his books, he described many principles of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and astronomy. Almost 500 years before Sir Isaac Newton, Bhāskara made a statement about the force of gravity, due to which different heavenly bodies like stars and planets attract each other. He also described the importance of the number 'zero' in mathematics and said that when any number is divided by zero, the result is 'infinity.' Below is a very interesting story from the life of Bhāskara and his daughter Līlāvati.



Story: The bad luck of Līlāvati: Bhāskara prepared a horoscope for her daughter and was saddened to predict from his calculations that soon after she married, her husband will die. However, there was a short period of time, during which if she married, her husband would live a long life with her.



Bhāskara decided that he will make extensive preparations so that she could get married to a deserving groom in that short window of time, because he did not want her to remain unmarried all her life. He arranged to have a water clock set up on the auspicious day which was good for her to get married. In this water clock, there were two pots, one above the other. The top pot had a hole at its bottom, and it was filled with water. From the level of water that had fallen into the lower pot, one could accurately measure the time that had passed. Līlāvati anxiously waited next to the water clock, while her father received the bridegroom and his family and seated them outside. The priests started chanting the mantras, and they all waited and waited. Bhāskara had instructed his daughter to come out to complete the ceremony of the marriage when the water had reached a particular level. But she did not come out because the water was taking a very long time to drain from the upper vessel to the lower one.

When Bhāskara peeped into the vessel he discovered what had happened. A pearl from his daughter's necklace had fallen, unknown to her, and had partially blocked the hole at the bottom of the first

vessel. Due to this, even though the 'lucky time period' during which she should have got married passed, the water in the lower vessel was still lower than what it should have been. Now, he did not want to risk the life of the groom by marrying her, because he had deep faith in astrology.

The father and daughter were very dismayed and cried at her bad luck. To turn away their minds from this sad turn of events, Bhāskara devoted his remaining life to studying mathematics. He invented many important mathematical formulae for the first time in human history. He taught the subject to his daughter, who too perhaps became a mathematician.

He wrote several works on mathematics like the Siddhānta Shiromaṇi and named its first section after his loving daughter Līlāvati.

Are you as smart as Līlāvati?

In his work Līlāvati, Bhāskara asked his daughter many interesting mathematical questions. Below, we give one of the simpler questions. Can you calculate the answer correctly and prove that you are at least as smart as Līlāvati?

Question: "A girl and her friend were playing, when the girl's pearl necklace broke. Most pearls scattered, but six still remained on the string. One sixth fell to the floor. One fifth upon the bed. The young woman saved one third of them. One tenth were caught by her friend. How many pearls were there altogether in the unbroken pearl necklace?"



5.4 Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan



Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887 – 1920 CE) is one of the greatest mathematicians who lived in modern times. He was born in Tamil Nadu (India) and died due to illness at the young age of 32 years. In his short life, he solved many complex mathematical problems. His parents were deeply religious Hindus. At the age of 26 in 1914, he visited England at the invitation of a notable mathematician named G H Hardy. Ramanujan had several illnesses during his life. The climate of England made him miserable. He was a strict vegetarian and had great problems getting a meat and egg free diet in England. As a result, he felt severely ill. When he returned home in 1919, he was already unwell and soon died thereafter in 1920 at the young age of 32.

Interestingly, Ramanujan had claimed that his brilliance in mathematics was due to the blessings of Devi Mahalakshmi of Nāmagiri, whom he and his family had worshipped for generations. He said that she would come in his dreams and reveal the solutions of complex mathematical equations. In fact, he used to say that, "An equation for me has no meaning, unless it represents a thought of God."



5.5 Hindu Architects Vishvakarma and Maya

According to the Hindu tradition, Vishvakarma was the first architect of humanity. Even today, a pūjā is performed to Vishvakarma once a year in many factories owned by Hindus. This is because Vishvakarma is treated as a Deva who should be respected and worshipped by all craftsmen and engineers. The mūrti

of Vishvakarma shows him holding tools in two of his hands. Many architects and craftsmen in India who can design traditional Hindu Mandirs claim to be descendants of Bhagavān Vishvakarma. Another famous architect in ancient times was Mayāsura. According to the Mahābhārata, Krishna commanded Mayāsura to construct the palace of the Pāṇḍava brothers in their capital city of Indraprastha. Today, New Delhi which is the capital of India, is constructed over this site.

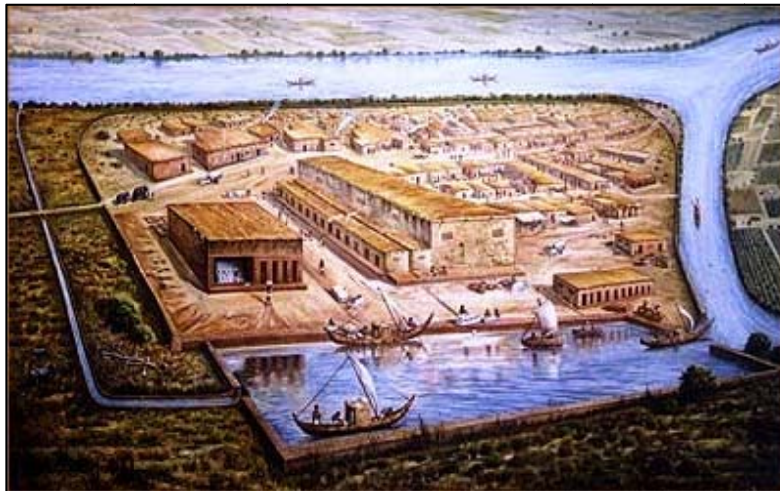
Two books on architecture named Vishvakarma Samhitā and Mayamatam are said to have been written by them respectively and are available today. But it appears that their original books are no longer available, and these two books were written by someone else in their name. However, from very ancient times, Hindu architecture appears to have followed very scientific principles.



In 2500 BCE, Hindus living along the banks of the Sarasvati and Indus rivers in NW India and Pakistan constructed numerous towns that were designed very scientifically. The streets in these towns were constructed at right angles to each other, and were broad enough to allow traffic to pass through them easily. From all homes, a drain took all dirty water and waste from the bathrooms and emptied it into a covered street drain that ran parallel to the streets. A master drain collected sewage from all these street drains and dumped it into a put away from the city. One of the cities Mohenjo Daro (now in Pakistan) had a large tank whose sides were sealed so that it could hold water, like a

swimming pool. The major streets were constructed in the directions at which important stars and constellations mentioned in the Vedas could be seen brightly at sunrise.

Another city named Lothal (in India) had a dockyard where boats could be loaded with goods for shipping. In



many towns, homes and other buildings were built of bricks which were of a standard size, and their height, width and length were in a fixed ratio. Moreover, archaeologists, who study these ancient ruins, have also found that many the ratio between the length and width of these buildings was exactly the same as ratio which books on Hindu architecture like Brihat Samhitā describe. Even though these books are from thousands of years later than these ancient structures, it is quite clear that they followed the same rules of architectural science. In other words, we

can conclude that the principles of Hindu architecture are perhaps the most ancient in the world, and are older than entire religions like Christianity and Islam. The sophistication of city planning that we see in towns along the Sarasvati and Indus rivers was not seen in the rest of the world till 2000 years later, during the Roman Civilization in Europe.

Further Research: Find out more about the contributions of the Hindus to the world in the field of mathematics. Research the achievements of the 'Kerala School of Mathematics and Astronomy'

6 Scholars of Hindu Languages, Arts & Law

Hindus speak and write in dozens of languages today. Most of our scriptures (holy books) and books on other subjects like astronomy and medicine were composed in a very ancient language called 'Sanskrit'. In ancient times, Sanskrit was used in many parts of India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Tibet (part of China) and in many other countries for religious purposes and for official government work, just like English is used in many countries today.

Sanskrit is a very beautiful language. Even prose passages in Sanskrit can be sung in a musical tone. When Europeans first discovered Sanskrit, they concluded that it was more perfect and complete than old European languages like Greek and Latin. When they studied Sanskrit grammar, they were amazed at how systematic and scientific the Sanskrit language was. In fact, the grammars of many European languages were re-designed by Europeans after studying the Sanskrit grammar of Panini, who lived around 500 BCE. In modern times, some people have suggested that Sanskrit is the best language for use in computers because it is very logical and scientific.

6.1 How Panini became a great Scholar



Once, Panini Muni went to a palmist for getting his hand read for determining his future. The palmist said to him, "You are fated to be an illiterate fool because the line of education is missing from your palm."

Panini asked him, "Tell me where that line is." When the palmist answered his question, Panini took a knife and carved the line at that place on his palm. Panini then decided to give up his laziness, and worked hard to learn the grammar of the Sanskrit language.

After sometime, he wrote the book 'Ashtādhyāyī', that is considered one of the greatest works of Sanskrit grammar even today, 2500 years after Panini had lived. Panini's grammar consists of just about 4000 short sentences called 'sūtras,' which can be memorized easily by students. It consists of eight chapters, of which two deal with the grammar of the Vedic scriptures, and the rest with the grammar of spoken Sanskrit, and the

language of other Hindu scriptures. His grammar has six appendices, of which some are said to have been composed by other scholars. It is the most scientific and systematic grammar known of all the languages of the world.

There is a very interesting story about how Panini died. He was teaching his students in an open air classroom when suddenly a lion arrived and started roaring. All the students ran away. But, Panini was so dedicated that he said to the students, "The roar of the lion is very interesting. Let me teach you how the sounds can be analyzed with the rules of Sanskrit grammar." Unfortunately, the lion did not want to learn grammar, and he killed and ate Panini.

But Panini's books on grammar became very famous. Almost a 1000 year later, a Chinese traveler named Hieun Tsang visited his birthplace Salatura and still saw a memorial that people had raised in his honor.

Panini's life shows that we must not get disheartened when someone tells us that 'you cannot do it because you do not have the intelligence.' By hard work, we can all overcome our weaknesses to become wise and knowledgeable.

6.2 Grammarian Kaiyyata (11th cent. CE): Focus on your studies

Kaiyyata of Kashmir was a famous scholar of grammar in Kashmir. It is said that he lived in abject poverty because his entire time was spent in studying and writing. His wife ran the household by cutting grass from the forest, making ropes from it and selling them.

Word reached the King of Kashmir that a great scholar resides in his kingdom but that he lives in poverty. The fame of Kaiyyata had reached Varanasi, the city famous for its scholarship. Some Brahmanas from Varanasi came to the King of Kashmir and said, "It is a shame that a great scholar as Kaiyyata has to live in great poverty in your kingdom."

The King felt embarrassed. The very next day, he proceeded to the hut of Kaiyyata and said, "I am embarrassed that I have not helped you financially. It is the duty of a King to provide for scholars in his kingdom. I have failed in my duty and therefore I have sinned."

Kaiyyata immediately called his wife and said, 'Our presence in Kashmir is causing our king to sin. Let us leave this country immediately.' The King fell at his feet and said, "Respected scholar, it was not my intention to insult you. But please let me know what I can offer you to make your life more comfortable?"

Kaiyyata said, "Your greatest service to me would be to leave me alone. Let me study and write in peace. Please do not send any official from your court to help me either. All I want is to do my work undisturbed."

6.3 Varadarāja (17th century CE): Do not give up easily

Several hundred years ago, there lived a child named Varadarāja. He was not a very intelligent child. He never understood anything that his teacher taught him. The other students in his class made fun of him and called him a dumb boy. One day, Varadarāja got so upset because of this constant teasing by his classmates that he decided to end his life. He wanted to drown himself in the well on the way to his home.

Just as he was about to jump into the well, he noticed something. On the stone wall around the well, there was a deep, straight mark. The mark was caused by the rope that rubbed against the stone when buckets of water were drawn up from the well.



Varadarāja thought to himself: "This stone is so hard, and the rope is so soft. But, when this rope keeps rubbing against the stone, it causes a mark even on the hard material of the stone. Likewise, if I keep practicing my teacher's school lessons at home, my dumb mind may also become intelligent and I will start understanding everything one day!"

Varadarāja became very happy as he thought this. He decided not to jump into the well, and started studying hard at home every day after his school was over. Soon, Varadarāja became very intelligent and knowledgeable. In fact, after a few years, he became one of the greatest scholars of Sanskrit language, and wrote a grammar called 'Laghusiddhānta Kaumudī' which is studied by Sanskrit scholars even today.

The moral of the story is that we must never pity ourselves, and should also never run away from challenges. We should not think of ourselves as weak or unintelligent.

If you find a subject in your school too difficult, keep studying and ask your teachers and parents for help. After a lot of hard work, you will start understanding it and will no longer find it difficult.

6.4 Sant Thiruvalluvar (200 BCE)

Another very ancient Hindu language is Tamil. According to Hindu tradition, both Sanskrit and Tamil were created by Bhagavān Shiva from the two sides of his damarū (drum). Scholars like Panini wrote the grammar of Sanskrit. Whereas Rishis like Agastya wrote the grammar of Tamil. Therefore, Tamil is also considered as a sacred language of Hindu Dharma by some, along with Sanskrit.

A beautiful scripture in Tamil is the Kural of Sant Thiruvalluvar, who was a weaver by profession. The Kural contains beautiful teachings on how one can live according to Dharma. It has over 1300 verses. A giant statue of this saint has been erected at Kanyākumārī, which is at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula. Nothing much is known about Thiruvalluvar except that he was probably a weaver by profession. It is said that his wife served her husband

with a lot of respect. In fact, more stories about her wonderful character are narrated, then about Thiruvalluvar himself. To give an example of the teachings of the Kural, let us give below some of its verses on the importance of children in our lives:



The greatest blessing in life is to give birth to children who are intelligent.

The real wealth of a man is his children. And if he has done good karma in the past, he will get intelligent children.

Far sweeter than the divine nectar (amrit) is simple boiled rice stirred by the small hands of one's own child.

The sounds that one's child makes are sweeter than the music from any flute or lute.

Parents are the happiest when their kids become better than them. A mother is happy when her child is born. She is even happier when he grows up to be a fine adult and hears others praising her child.

From the Kural of Thiruvalluvar

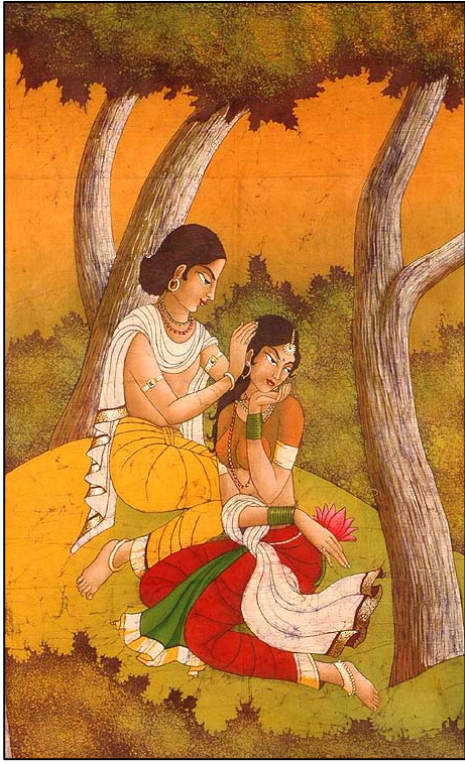
Hindu saints started writing our scriptures in the Tamil language more than 2000 years ago. Some Tamil writings like the Tiruvāyamoli are regarded as sacred as the Vedas themselves by some Hindus. We have already described in the chapter on Rishis how the Tamil language is also Divine in origin just like Sanskrit.

In fact, Hindus have a very large number of books not only in Sanskrit and in Tamil, but also in many other languages like Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Nepali, Bengali, Telugu, Kannada, Javanese (from Indonesia) and Punjabi.

6.5 The Sixty-Four Hindu Arts (Kalās)

In the ancient Hindu society, there were 64 arts and skills that were considered important. These included sculpting, painting, music, cooking and sports like wrestling. Ancient Rishis and other scholars wrote books on these arts. Dozens of books are available today to understand these ancient Hindu arts, even though most of these books were lost with time. It is amazing how the ancient Hindu scholars studied so many subjects in a very detailed and scientific manner.

Cooking: Likewise, some of the most ancient books on the art of cooking also came from the Hindus. For example, there is a book called the 'Pākadarpaṇa' that was written by King Nala. In this book, food items and spices that were not known in ancient India are not mentioned at all. For example, the book does not mention tomatoes, potatoes, corn and green pepper because these plants came from other parts of the world like the Americas. There is a very interesting story from the life of Nala and his wife Queen Damayantī.



Due to some misfortune, they were separated. By chance, she found a job in a royal palace and Nala was appointed as the cook of same royal kitchen. One day, Damayanti tasted some food from the royal kitchen and instantly recognized that these flavors could only be from her husband's cooking. The story had a good ending and the separated couple was re-united. Does this not show that Dads can cook too?

Music, Dance and Drama: Hindus have dozens of beautiful dances that they perform on all occasions. Even in a country like Indonesia that has mostly become Muslim, most of the traditional dances are still performed using Hindu stories. Perhaps the oldest book in the entire world that deals with dance and drama is the 'Nāṭya Shāstra' of **Bharat Muni**. It is written on 6000 verses. It is believed that Bharat Muni carefully observed Bhagavān Shiva while he did the tāṇḍava dance and noted down the details before he wrote his book. Rishi Nārada too wrote a book on music that is used even today. Many musical instruments were invented by the Hindus. The Veenā, which is mentioned

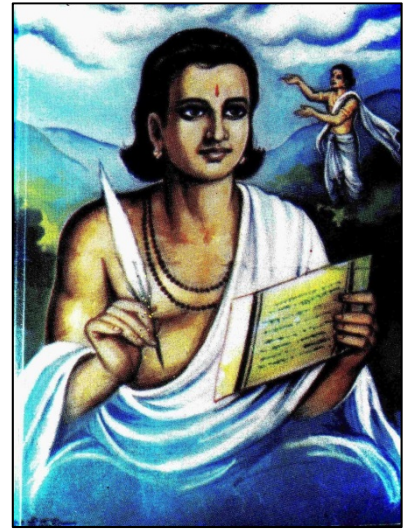
even in the Vedas, is regarded as the first stringed instrument in the world. Can you name some other stringed instrument that you have seen? In Islam, music is considered a sin whereas in Hindu Dharma, we believe that spiritual music can bring us closer to Bhagavān. This is the reason why the Sāmaveda, which is one of the four Vedas, is sung using many different musical melodies. Today, there are almost 8000 melodies used for singing the Samaveda but there were many times more in ancient times.



6.6 Kālidāsa:

Kālidāsa is regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the Sanskrit language. He is believed to have lived around the 5th century CE. Kālidāsa was raised as an orphan by cowherds. He was a very dull-witted as a child, and illiterate. But, he was deeply devoted to Mā Kālī's mūrti in the local Mandir. Having lost his own parents, he regarded Her as the real Mother. He would dance to her, and sing her praises. As a kid, he would often say to Her, "**Release me because I want to return to you, my Mother.**" He would even sleep at the entrance of the Mandir because he did not want to be away from Her. Everyone made fun of him and thought of him as a stupid boy who would talk to a stone mūrti as if it were a living Devī. Kālidāsa ignored their sarcasms and jokes because he was deeply devoted to Her.

He grew up to be a very handsome man, but was uneducated and foolish. A princess of central India at that time was very learned and was a bit arrogant towards other scholars because she thought that they were not as learned as she was. Therefore, the scholars decided to teach her a lesson. She had declared that she will marry only that man who could defeat her in a debate on philosophy. Finding Kālidāsa to be a stupid man, they came up with a plan to fool the princess so that she marries him. They dressed him up as a scholar and told him to communicate only through sign language, without speaking a

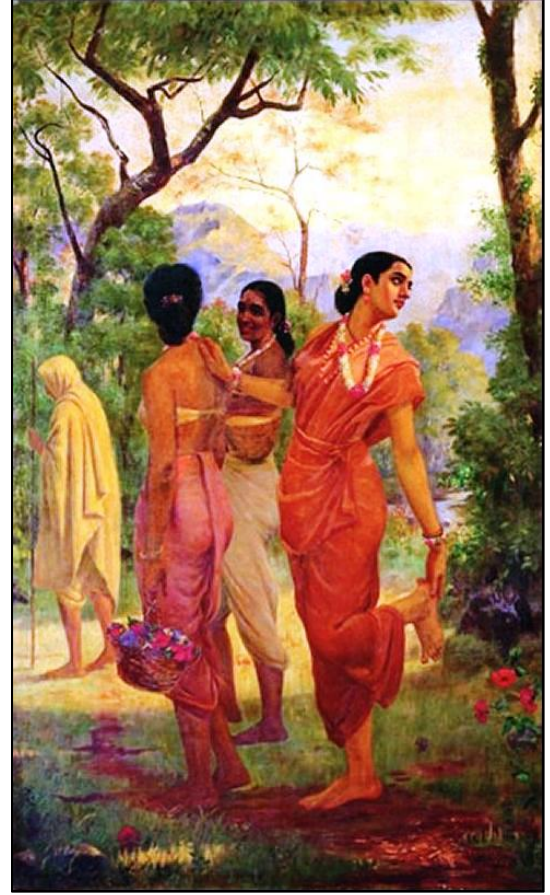


single word. Every time the Princess asked Kālidāsa a question, he responded by making meaningless gestures. The scholars who had come with Kālidāsa interpreted these gestures in a funny way and the scholars then made up answers that impressed the Princess. Impressed with these 'answers' that the scholars gave, she accepted her defeat in the debate and married Kālidāsa. But soon after marriage, she found out what a fool her husband was. In a fit of anger, she insulted him and said, "Do not show me your face till you become a scholar."

Kālidāsa was very hurt, and he left his home immediately with the vow that he will return to his wife only after he has become a learned scholar. He went to the Mandir where he spent a lot of time in his childhood and worshipped Devi Kālī. One night, the Devī appeared to him in a dream and said, "Of all my bhaktas, you are the most devoted to Me. You do not mind facing the ridicule of others for My sake. Therefore, I will bless you with great wisdom and knowledge. You will become renowned and wealthy."

When Kālidāsa woke up, he was a totally transformed person. He studied hard under competent teachers and soon became extremely wise, and could compose beautiful poetry due to the Devī's boon and his hard work. Now, he felt confident to return to his wife. When she opened the door to him, she asked him in a Sanskrit sentence if he had returned as a scholar. To her utter surprise, Kālidāsa immediately composed a few verses, each of which started with one word of the sentence that she had spoken. She was now satisfied that her husband had become a great scholar.

In the next few years, Kālidāsa wrote several plays in Sanskrit. These plays became an instant hit in his lifetime. We have already read about his play on the life of Shakuntalā. The picture on the right shows a scene from this play, as painted by the famous Hindu king **Raja Ravi Verma** of south Kerala (India). This king, famous for his paintings, lived from 1848 – 1906 CE. In fact, in the 18th century, his plays began to be translated into several European languages like German and English.



Soon, Kālidāsa's fame spread far and wide, and Emperor Vikramaditya of northern India, about whom we will read more later, invited him to be one of the 'nine jewels' (respected scholars) of his royal court. The Emperor showered Kālidāsa with a lot of wealth to appreciate the wonderful plays that he wrote.

Unfortunately, after a while, success made Kālidāsa acquire very bad habits like drinking, and watching dances all the time. Once, while he was on a tour of Sri Lanka, he fell in love with a dancer, who was in reality a very conniving and a jealous person. She eyed the wealth of Kālidāsa, and one day, she poisoned his food and drink. As Kālidāsa lay on his death bed, his friend Kumāradasa rushed to him and asked, "Dear friend which of your plays, or which lines on your plays do you regard as your best composition?" Kālidāsa looked at him in pain and said, "Towards the end of my play Abhijnāna Shākuntalam, the little prince Bharat says to his mother Shakuntalā, 'Release me because I want to return to you, my Mother'. This I consider to be my best line." And then, Kālidāsa died, thinking of Mā Kālī.

Class Discussion:

Why do you think Kālidāsa thought that his best composition ever was 'Release me because I want to return to you, my Mother'? What do you think these words meant when he said them before dying?

6.7 The Generosity of Poet Māgha and his Wife:

The Sanskrit poet Māgha (7th cent. CE) was also a very kind man. He was very carefree with his wealth. His wife too was a very compassionate lady. As a result, he lived in poverty towards the end of his life. One day, a poor man knocked at his door, asking for some money so that he could marry off his daughter.

Māgha saw that his wife, who was sleeping at that night, was wearing two gold bangles. He quietly slipped off one of them from her wrist and donated it to the visitor. But, his wife woke up, he hesitatingly told her why he had taken her bangle.

His wife said, “How can that man marry his daughter with just one gold bangle. Please take off my other gold bangle too and give it to him.”

6.8 Hindu Lawyers: Rām Shāstrī (18th century CE)

Many Hindu Rishis like Manu, Brihaspati and Nārada wrote books called the ‘Dharmashāstras.’ A large portion of these books dealt with how disputes between people over various issues (e.g. possession of land or gold, non-repayment of loans, theft) should be solved in courts. In fact, modern scholars sometimes say that the Hindu law books (especially those of Rishi Nārada) are as sophisticated and complicated as modern books on this topic, even though the Hindu law books were written thousands of years ago! This shows that the Hindu society wanted that everyone deserved justice and that the strong did not harass the weaker people in our communities.

One can earn a lot of money by adopting the profession of an attorney lawyer or a court judge. Unfortunately, many attorneys choose to defend extremely evil but rich criminals so that they can make a lot of money. However, our Dharmashāstras teach us that the purpose of being a lawyer, attorney or a judge is not to make money but to make sure that people get justice according to Dharma. Let us read below the story of a Hindu judge who chose to live the life of poverty, and did not hesitate to condemn his own king as a murderer. He lost his job and risked his life, but preferred to side with Dharma rather than give a false judgment in his court of law.

Story: Judge Rām Shāstrī prefers poverty and unemployment over riches earned through dishonesty

Rām Shāstrī was the chief judge at the royal court of the Peshwā (title of the King of the Maratha Hindu Empire), who ruled a large empire in India, in the second half of the 18th century CE, from the city of Pune in western India. He was very learned in the Vedas and other Hindu scriptures. He lived a very simple and frugal life, following the Hindu scriptural teachings that Brahmanas must not live lavishly.

One day, his wife visited the Queen in her palace. Seeing her soiled clothes, the Queen gifted her with expensive clothing and jewelry. When Ram Shastri saw his wife return home wearing her gifts in a palanquin, he immediately shut the door on her, saying, “It looks like a Queen has accidentally come to a poor Brahmana’s home.” The wife understood her husband’s intent. She returned to the palace and changed back into her old clothes.



This time, when she walked to her home, she found that Ram Shastri had already kept the door opened for her to enter. When she arrived, he said to her, “A Brahmana’s wife must also live very simply, otherwise we will lose our real treasure, which is humility.”

Sometime later, the Peshwā died, and his son, a child, was murdered by his Uncle Raghobā. Ram Shastri was asked to adjudicate in the case, and be the judge in the trial of Raghobā.

Raghobā and his wife were a very powerful couple in the Maratha Empire. They offered riches to Ram Shastri if he delivered a verdict declaring them innocent. When Ram Shastri did not agree, they threatened to have him murdered. But he still did not budge, and finally pronounced Raghobā guilty of murder of his nephew. Due to political complications, Raghobā was spared the sentence and was asked to be the next King. Ram Shastri then left Pune retired to his native village. He preferred to live the rest of his life in isolation and poverty than give up his principles of truth, honesty and simple living.

Class Discussion:

1. Imagine that you are an attorney defending a man accused of murdering his wife. You believe that he is innocent. But after sometime, you realize that he is in fact the killer of his wife. Would you continue to defend that person in the courts?
2. In the Manusmriti, an ancient Hindu scripture, the punishment for a laborer abusing a priest is higher, than for a priest abusing a laborer. But, the punishment for a priest who commits a theft is higher than for a laborer who does the same crime. Do you think that is fair? Why do you think the Manusmriti gives different levels of punishments to priest and laborers?

7. Great Emperors of Ancient India

7.1 Chandragupta Maurya (Ruled from 322 – 298 BCE) & Guru Chāṇakya

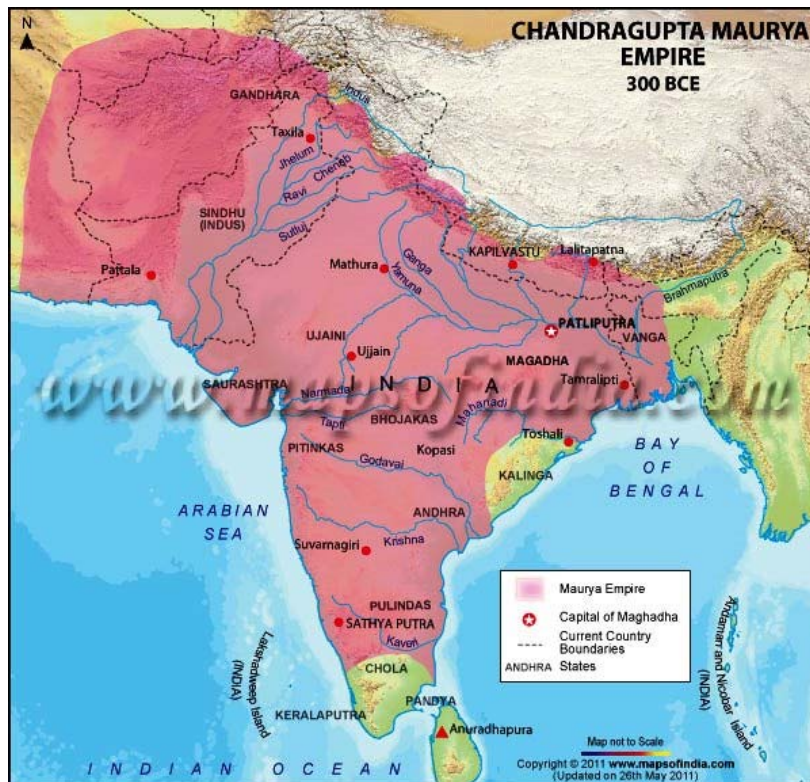
In the year 327 BCE, Alexander the Great invaded northwestern parts of India after having defeated the Persian Empire. One of the first Indian kings he encountered was King Āmbhi of Taxila (today in Pakistan), who accepted defeat without fighting the invader. Taxila had a great university at that time and one of Professors who taught there was Chāṇakya. Alexander easily marched through Taxila, till he faced the army of the next Indian king named Paurava, who ruled the region of West Punjab in Pakistan. Although Alexander's army was four times larger than that of Paurava, he could win the battle against the Indian king only with great difficulty.

Alexander then decided to invade northern India, most of which was ruled by the powerful Emperor of the Nanda dynasty. But the Greek soldiers, who had fought battles for Alexander all these years, refused to march further.

They had heard that the Nanda Emperor was very powerful. Moreover, the soldiers in Alexander's army were homesick because it had been several years since they had left Greece.

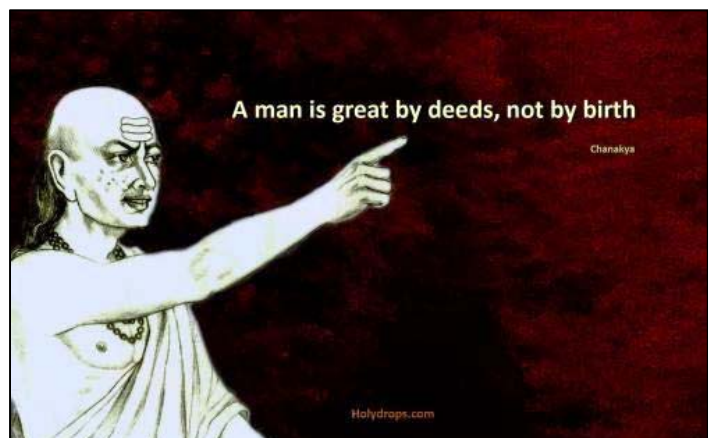
Finally, Alexander bowed to the wishes of his soldiers and decided to leave India. He entrusted his entire territory that he had conquered in India, which today forms the countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan, to his generals and started his journey towards Greece.

Meanwhile, Chāṇakya was very angry with his King Āmbhi for having surrendered to a foreign invader. He wanted the Indian kings to create a unified army so that no foreigner could again invade India. He even went to the Nanda Emperor, who ruled from the city of Pataliputra, but was disappointed. But luckily, he came across a young teenager named Chandragupta Maurya.



The subjects of the Nanda Emperor hated their king for his cruelty and because the first king of the dynasty had become their ruler by trickery. It is said that the first Nanda king was the barber to the earlier King of Pataliputra. He fell in love with the Queen, and together, the two killed the earlier King, and Nanda became the new ruler instead. But the people of the kingdom never forgave Nanda or his successors for this act.

Chandragupta, with the guidance of Chāṇakya collected a large army of the youth of Magadha, which was the name of the kingdom ruled by the Nanda Emperor. He was successful in defeating and killing the hated Nanda King, and became the first Emperor of the Mauryan dynasty. He was only 20 years old at that time! Slowly, he conquered one Indian kingdom after another, and established one of the largest empires in the



Indian history.

Seleucus Nikator, the Greek general left behind by Alexander in region of NW India, thought of invading Magadha so that India could be added to the Greek Empire. However, the army of Chandragupta Maurya defeated him. As a result, Seleucus Nikator married his daughter to Chandragupta Maurya, and also gave the entire territory of what is today Pakistan and Afghanistan to become a part of Magadhan Empire.

Chāṇakya wrote a book named 'Arthashāstra', which is today the oldest surviving book in the world that deals with subjects like politics, administration, exploiting natural resources, and finance and so on. In this book, Chāṇakya quotes many other older books from India on these topics. Isn't it amazing how advanced Indians were in the art of administration of the country even in ancient times? He also wrote several verses on wisdom, which are known as 'Chanakya Neeti.' The pictures in this section give two of these verses.

Several hundred years later, a poet named Vishākhadatta wrote a play named Mudrārākshasa which described how the shrewd and clever Chāṇakya helped Chandragupta Maurya create and defend his vast Empire. For



"Education is your
best friend. An
Educated person is
respected everywhere.
Education beats
beauty and youth."

example, Chandragupta Maurya was waiting to enter the old palace of the Nanda Emperor and occupy it when Chāṇakya decided to inspect it. Nothing seemed suspicious till Chāṇakya saw a row of ants carrying grain. He immediately ordered the palace to be burned down. Chandragupta Maurya was furious over this destruction of his new place, till Chāṇakya took him to the basement of the burnt down palace. There, they saw charred bodies of hundreds of enemy soldiers who were still loyal to the Nanda Emperor, and were waiting for Chandragupta to enter the palace so that they could kill him! In many other cases, Chāṇakya used poison to kill Chandragupta's enemies, and even forged letters to create enmity

between kings who were plotting to unite and fight against Chandragupta.

Thanks to the efforts of Chandragupta Maurya and Chāṇakya, the Greek invaders were expelled from India and once more, Indians of all faiths could live in freedom. When Chandragupta Maurya became older, he became a follower of the Jaina Dharma, and moved to southern India for the rest of his life, after making his son Bindusara as the next emperor of India.

7.2 Emperor Ashoka (Ruled from 269 – 232 BCE)

Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, turned out to be one of India's greatest emperors. It is said that as a young man, he was a very cruel person. When his father Emperor Bindusara died, Ashoka killed all the other Princes so that he could become the next Emperor.

Ashoka noted that except for the kingdom of Kalinga on the east coast of India (see the map on the previous page), all other kingdoms in region had either been conquered by his father and grandfather, or had accepted the Mauryan Emperor as their master. Ashoka decided to teach Kalinga a lesson. He ordered his vast army to invade Kalinga.

The kingdom of Kalinga would not give up easily. They fought bravely to defend their land. But eventually, they were defeated by the much larger Mauryan army. In fact, it is said that the last defense of Kalinga was led by none other than the Princess of the country. When Ashoka learned of her bravery, he felt ashamed. Ashoka now went on a tour of Kalinga to see the land that his army had conquered. But instead of feeling proud, he was horrified to

learn that more than 100,000 soldiers of Kalinga had died defending their land. In addition, the Mauryan army had killed another 150,000 residents of Kalinga. Their blood had stained the soil of the area red.

Ashoka felt very guilty at the horrible slaughter of innocents that he had caused. He happened to meet a Buddhist Sadhu who comforted the Emperor with the teachings of Bhagavān Buddha. Ashoka now realized that one becomes happy not by killing others and ruling over them, but by following the path of peace. He decided that henceforth, his army will not fight any wars. He decided to take care of all the subjects of his Empire as his own children. At his orders, Ashoka's message to his people was carved on large boulders and pillars all over his empire, so



that people could read these teachings and live peaceful and happy lives. These inscriptions in stone are in an ancient script called the 'Brāhmi.' All modern Indian scripts (and many more in S E Asia) have originated from this ancient script of Brāhmi. One of these inscriptions is shown at the left.

In these inscriptions, Ashoka asks his people to do the following:

1. Give up violence against other people.
2. Avoid hurting or killing animals.
3. Respect one's parents, friends and teachers.
4. Give charity to Brahmanas and to the Sadhus.
5. Respect the beliefs and religions followed by others. Not say that one's own religion is better than that of others
6. Live with a pure mind and lead a disciplined life.
7. Always practice the path of Dharma.
8. Ashoka also declared that after the war of Kalinga, he regrets the bloodshed that he had caused. Therefore, he will now work all his life only for the victory of Dharma, and will treat his subjects as if they were his own children.

It was the first time in human history when a victorious Emperor had decided to give up all war, and follow the path of peace. This does not mean that Ashoka's soldiers

lost their jobs. Instead, Ashoka used his army not to invade other countries, but only to bring under control any traitors who revolted against his country. Ashoka also spent a lot of money to spread the message of Buddha all over Asia. His son and daughter went to places like Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism. Largely due to their efforts, Buddhism is the religion of the majority of people today in Sri Lanka and in many other countries. Buddhism is a sister religion of Hindu Dharma. Therefore, as Buddhism spread abroad, people in these countries also adopted many Hindu beliefs and practices.

Ashoka also had beautiful structures constructed at places associated with the life of Buddha. A 'wheel' called 'Dharmachakra' (the wheel of Dharma) from a pillar that he had constructed is today included in the national flag of India.

Story: The best administrator in Ashoka's Empire

On his birthday, Emperor Ashoka summoned the Governors of all the provinces of his empire. He announced that he will reward that Governor who administered his province better than all others in the past one year.

Governors from many provinces came forward one by one, but all of them had the same thing to say, "Your Highness, we raised taxes on people, and therefore raised much more money for the royal treasury than last year."

However, the Governor of Magadha had a totally different story to narrate. He said, "I apologize for collecting only half amount as taxes compared to last year. I reduced the tax burden on the general population, spent money to improve our infrastructure of roads so that the traders could pursue their profession more easily, built homes for orphans, rest-houses for travelers and schools for children. As a result of these expenses, our tax collection this year was low."



The Emperor arose from his throne and said, "I do not wish to fill my treasury by forcing people to pay taxes. A King should not exploit his people. Rather, he should treat his subjects as his own children. He must look after their needs and make sure that they become more happy and prosperous. Only the Governor of Magadha has followed this idea of how a King should rule. Therefore, this year's award goes to him."

7.3 Raja Bhartihari and Emperor Vikramāditya

Raja Bhartrihari was a very noble king who ruled from the city of Ujjain in central India (or from Patna in eastern India according to others). This city has a famous temple of Shiva, known as the Mahākāleshvara Mandir. The King was a very sincere Bhakta of Shiva. Pleased with his devotion, Devi Pārvatī appeared to him one day with a Divine fruit, and said, "I am pleased with your bhakti. Therefore, I am offering this fruit to you. After you eat it, you will regain your young age and will always look young and handsome." The King bowed to the Devi and gratefully accepted the fruit. He worshipped it but just before he was about to eat it, he thought, "I love my queen dearly. I cannot bear to see her get old while I stay young. I will gift the fruit to her."

He took the fruit to her and explained its Divine qualities. The queen accepted the fruit from the king and pretended to be overcome with emotion and love. But she had a different plan in her mind. She said to the king, "I think I will spend tonight fasting, and worshipping Shiva. After I have become pure in this way, I will eat the fruit tomorrow morning." In reality, she was in love with the military commander of Raja Bhartrihari's army! She sent him a secret message, asking him to come to her palace quietly. Then, she gifted him the fruit, after explaining to him its marvelous properties. And unknown to her, the military commander was in love with one of the maids of the queen, and gifted the fruit to her. She, in turn, loved a laborer, who in turn loved a poor woman who worked in the fields. In this way, the fruit passed many hands till it was next morning.

The poor woman thought, “Our country is ruled by a very noble king. For the good of Ujjain, let me gift it to Raja Bhartihari.” She appeared in his court with the fruit and offered it to the king after explaining its wonderful qualities to him. Raja Bhartrihari was shocked to see her gifting him the same fruit that he had gifted the previous night to his own queen out of love. He asked the queen to state the truth, and out of fear, she revealed everything. Soon, Bhartrihari found out how the fruit had changed owners one after another, because people had betrayed each other.



That day, a feeling of great sadness filled his mind. He thought, “All relations in this world are temporary and false. People just pretend to love each other. But almost everyone is fake, and tries to take advantage of others by pretending to love them. I have been living all my life amongst people I had trusted and loved. But they have all betrayed me. Perhaps, instead of trusting other humans, I should direct all my faith, trust and love towards Bhagavān Shiva.”

He summoned his noble younger brother Vikramāditya and said, “Brother, I have decided to give my kingdom and become a Sannyāsī. I want you to be the king of Ujjain now. I will spend the rest of my life meditating and in the search of a true Guru.”

Vikramāditya then became the king of Ujjain. He proved to be one of the greatest emperors of the Hindus in all times. Meanwhile, Bhartrihari visited several holy places like Haridwar on the Gangā river, Shalyakot (now called Sialkot in Pakistan), Shivishthan (now called Sehwan) on the Indus river in Sindh and so on. Temples and memorials are found even today at many of these places. He is said to have accepted a sant named Gorakhnāth as his Guru. He wrote several works on Sanskrit grammar of which one (called ‘Vākyapadīyam’) is studied even today. He wrote 300 verses each on the topics of beauty, wisdom and non-attachment (to people and worldly pleasures) respectively. In one of these verses, he describes how he lost all his attachment to the world after his own wife betrayed him. Even today, scholars memorize these verses which give us many valuable lessons of life. Let us read two of his verses below:

<i>Saahitya samgiita kalaa vihiinah, Saakshaatpashuh puchhavisshaanahinah/ Trinanna khaadannapi jivamaanastad, Bhaagadheyam paramam pashuunaam/ /</i> Nitishataka of Bhartrihari Muni	They who are ignorant in music, art and literature are like deformed animals that lack a tail or horns. Animals are fortunate that such humans do not eat fodder, or else such useless humans would not have left anything for animals to eat! Nitishataka of Bhartrihari Muni
<i>Yeshaam na vidyaa na tapo na daanam, Jnaanam na sheelam na guno na dharmah / Te martyaloke bhuvi bhaarabhuutaa manushyaruupena mrigaascharati / /</i> Nitishataka of Bhartihari Muni	They who have neither knowledge, nor any austerity, philanthropy, wisdom, virtues, skills or fidelity towards Dharma – such humans are a burden on this world, and are like animals in human form roaming on this earth. Nitishataka of Bhartrihari Muni

In those days, large parts of western and central India were ruled by Shakas, who were invaders from Central



Asia. King Vikramāditya fought them, and drove out the Shakas from India and freed the land. People rejoiced at their freedom and to celebrate his victory, a new calendar named the 'Vikramī Samvat' was started. This calendar is still used in large parts of India and Nepal for religious purposes by Hindus, Jains and Sikhs. A Chinese traveler named Fa Hien visited India by crossing the Himalayas in the early 5th century CE and described that the people were very prosperous, honest and law abiding. They ate pure food, avoided alcohol and were very hospitable.

In the later part of his rule, King Vikramāditya moved his capital from Ujjain to the holy city of Ayodhyā, which was the capital of Bhagavān Rama. By that time, Ayodhyā had become a ruined town and had to be rebuilt. An interesting story is narrated in our times about how Vikramāditya discovered the holy sites of Ayodhyā. Emperor Vikramāditya and his troops passed through a

forest after driving the Scythians invaders out of India. There, a Sadhu informed the victorious Emperor, "This forest marks the site of the sacred city of Ayodhya where the Divine King Rama had once ruled. With the passage of time, the city has become desolate and a forest now occupies its place. But if you meditate on Rama, you will have a glimpse of Him in your heart whenever you are at a spot associated with His divine acts." Emperor Vikramāditya did as he was



told, and was able to unearth 360 sacred sites related to the life of Rama. He then moved his capital city to Ayodhya, which was restored to its ancient glory.

← Gold coins of Vikramāditya

Under the rule of King Vikramāditya, India made great advances in poetry, art, literature, mathematics and sciences. Many renowned poets like Kālīdāsa, astronomers

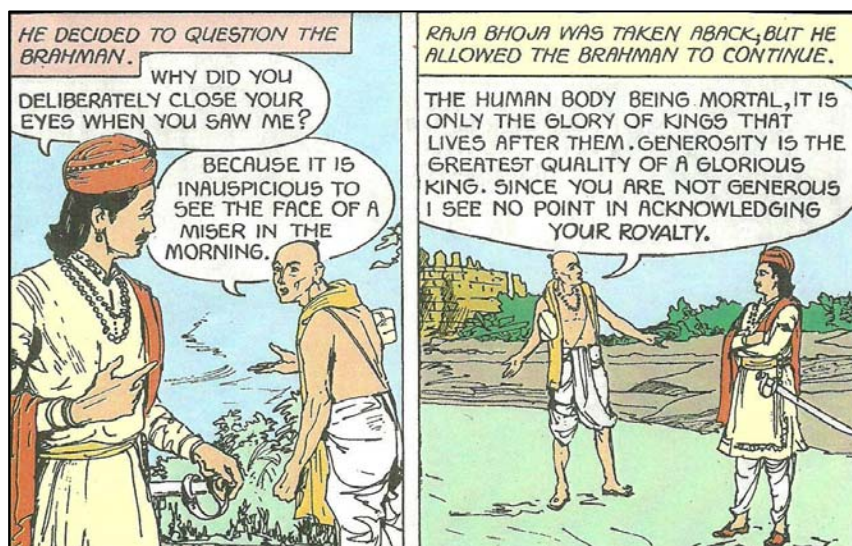
like Varāhamihīra and other scholars lived during the reign of the Gupta dynasty. For this reason, the rule of Vikramāditya and other kings of his 'Gupta' dynasty is sometimes referred to as the 'Golden Age' of India.

7.4 Raja Bhoja

Raja Bhoja, who ruled central India in the 11th century CE, was renowned for his generosity and patronage to scholars and poets. He also constructed the famous Sarasvati Mandir at Vidisha in central India.

Story: Flatterers are plenty, Truth Speakers are Rare

In his initial years, Bhoja was a miserly King. One morning, he was touring his capital. A Brahmana crossed his way, and then suddenly turned his face away.



Raja Bhoja was perplexed, because the Brahmana had insulted him by not greeting his own King. He asked the Brahmana as to why he had the look of disgust when he saw his King. The Brahmana replied, "Your majesty, wealth and joys of this world are all temporary and they do not last forever. It is only our good acts of Dharma that accompany us when we die. Giving charity brings glory to Kings that last beyond their lives. Unfortunately, you are a miser and it is bad luck to see the face of a miser in the morning. That the reason why I had turned my face away from you."

The King was impressed with the Brahmana's response. He thought, "It is not difficult for a King to be surrounded by flatterers. But this Brahmana is brave and truthful." He asked the Brahmana to come to the court every day to give a sermon. And from that day onwards, Raja Bhoja became a great patron of scholars and poets.

Story: Benefits of Reading Scriptures

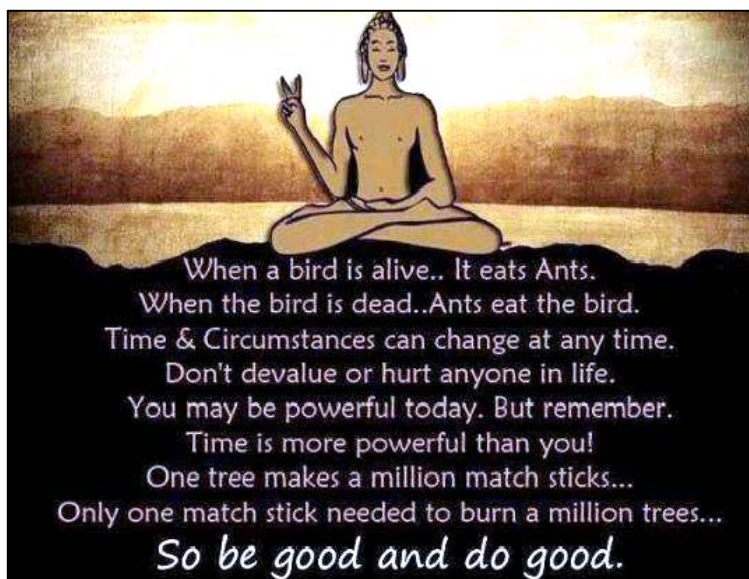
A traditional story is narrated from the life of Raja Bhoja. In his kingdom, there lived a virtuous Brahmana who was very learned in Hindu scriptures, but was very poor. The Brahmana was too proud to beg for food. But one day, he was so overcome by the hardships of poverty that he decided to rob Raja Bhoja's palace.

He somehow entered the palace on a dark night, and reached the chamber in which the King was sleeping with his queen. Expensive jewels, gold jewelry and other costly items were scattered all across the room. The Brahmana could have stolen some of them, but just at that moment, he recalled the teachings of scriptures that one must not steal. Heeding the teaching, he refrained from the evil act. But now, he realized that the sun was rising on the horizon and darkness was vanishing rapidly. There was no way he could free from the palace in daylight. Scared, he quickly hid under the bed of the King.

Soon thereafter royal attendants arrived to awaken the King and the Queen with song and music. The King got out of the bed in a good mood, and said three quarters of a verse that praised the joys and pleasures of his life.

When the Brahmana heard these words, he could not restrain himself and uttered the fourth quarter of the verse, "But none of these remain when the eyes are shut."

Startled the King bent down and saw him. His guards rushed to arrest the Brahmana. The King asked him the reason for his hiding. The Brahmana narrated how he wanted to rob the palace but that he recalled the words of shāstras at that very moment and therefore stopped himself. The King was pleased to hear the truthful Brahmana and said, "Since you have practiced the teachings of our scriptures, I will not let you go away empty handed. You certainly seem to be a scholar because you completed my verse. And I value scholarship and give gifts to poets in



my kingdom.” Saying this, Raja Bhoja ordered that the Brahmana be sent away with costly presents.

Story: We take nothing upon death

It is said that when Raja Bhoja was on his death bed, he summoned his Prime Minister and said, “When my dead body is being taken to the cremation ground on a carriage for the funeral, thousands of my citizens will line up the streets to pay their respects. I want you to expose both the arms of my corpse. Also, you must paint one of the arms black, and the other with the white color.”

The Prime Minister was puzzled at the King’s strange request and asked him the reason. Raja Bhoja replied, “My bare arms and hands signify that I came empty handed in this world, and will leave empty handed as well. Nothing of my wealth and riches will accompany me after death. The colors on my arms will indicate that only by white and black deeds – my evil and virtuous karma, will go with me to the other world!”

7.5 Raja Raja Chola I (985 – 1014 CE)



The Cholas were one of the most ancient ruling dynasties of the Hindus. They are first mentioned in the Tamil Sangam literature that is perhaps more than 2000 years old. Two of the greatest Emperors of this dynasty were Raja Raja Chola I and his son Rajendra Chola I.

Raja Raja Chola I had initially refused to become the king after his father King Parantaka II because his Uncle (father’s brother) wanted to be the king. Out of regard for his Uncle, Raja Raja let him become the king of the Chola kingdom when his father passed away. His Uncle was deeply touched by his nephew’s gesture and after he passed away, Raja Raja I finally became the Chola king, 17 years after the death of his own father.

Raja Raja Chola defeated most of the kings of South India and also invaded Sri Lanka, occupying the island nation. His navy also conquered islands called Maldives, which is today an independent country. Although he himself worshipped Shiva, he had a lot of respect for Hindus worshipping Vishnu, and also for Buddhist religion.

In the year 1010 CE, he completed the construction of the Brihadeeshvara Shiva temple, which is one of the grandest Hindu temples ever constructed. The Mandir is 216 feet high and is topped by a giant stone that is several tons heavy. The Shivalinga inside the Mandir is two stories high. Two very beautiful stories are narrated about the construction of the Mandir, which show how humble the king was.



One day, the King visited the Mandir while the chief architect was sculpting a murti. The sculptor did not notice that the visitor was the king himself, and thought that it was his servant boy. The sculptor said, “Make me a paan.” The King respectfully rolled betel nuts in a paan leaf and gave it to the sculptor, who took them without noticing that it was the king’s hand that had given him the paan. After chewing the paan for a while, he wanted to spit out some saliva and said, “Boy, please bring my spittoon.”



The king humbly and quietly gave it to the sculptor. After the sculptor had spat into the spittoon and raised his head, he was shocked to see that his 'servant' was none other than the king. The sculptor was terrified and fell at the king's feet asking for forgiveness. But the humble king lifted him from the ground and with a smile said, "It was my honor to serve a great sculptor like you. Do not worry because I was not offended by your orders to me at all."

For constructing the temple, workmen and sculptors were brought in from all over the country. They worked hard all day, digging the earth and chiseling stone. By evening they were completely

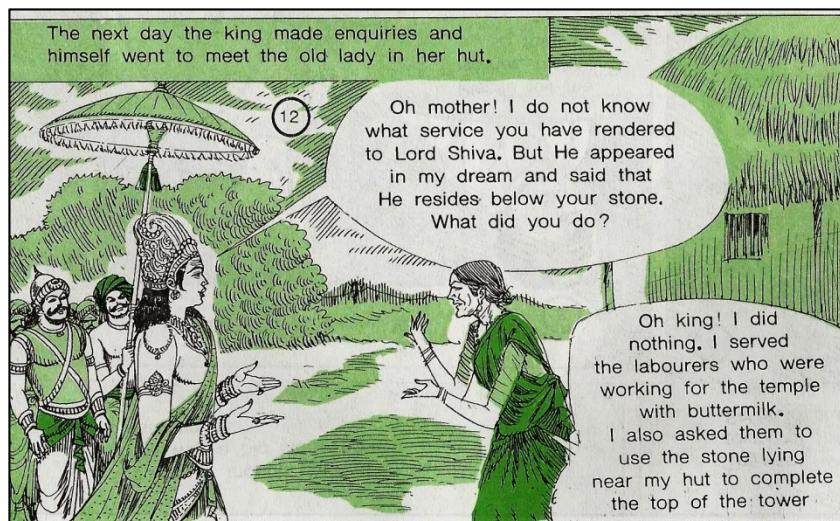
exhausted. Near the site of the temple, there lived an old woman called Alagi. Although she was weak and in poor health, Alagi wanted to do her bit for her king and for Shiva. As she wandered around the site, she saw that the laborers became exhausted under the noonday sun, and could hardly lift their heads. Everyday Alagi made buttermilk with spices. She poured it in pots and served the artisans with her own hands. Refreshed by the drink, the men found energy to work better, and for longer hours.

Many rich merchants and nobles competed with one another to contribute to the temple. Lavish gifts and ornaments were given by the king's family. Alagi also wanted to make a contribution. So she went to the chief mason and asked him to use a granite stone she had at the back of the house. Her neighbors laughed at her foolishness, but the mason, who had seen her serving his people for many long years, agreed to use it as a coping stone (stone at the top of the temple).

Six years later, the temple was complete. The king fixed an auspicious day for its inauguration and hundreds of priests, cooks and entertainers were called up for service. The night before the ceremony however, the king had a dream. Bhagavān Shiva appeared before him and said he would be pleased to reside under the shelter provided by Alagi. The king was astounded. It was he who had planned and executed the temple project. His family, friends and allies had generously gifted money, images and jewels. Who was this Alagi that Shiva was speaking of?

The next day, the King went to the temple, thinking that she lived there. But she was not to be found there. He sent out a search party for her. She was soon found, living in a small hut. The emperor learned of her tireless

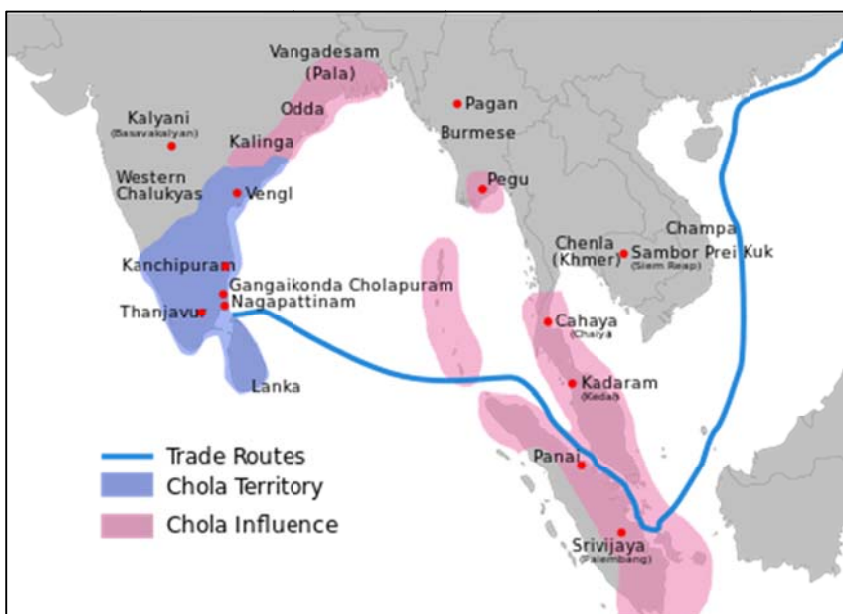
efforts in taking care of the workers for several years during the hot afternoons, day after day, and her humble offering of a stone. Humbled by her devotion, the King went with folded hands to her hut, and respectfully brought her to the temple himself. He honored her before the crowd gathered before starting the ceremony for inaugurating for the temple. He proclaimed that her simple devotion had won favor in the eyes of the Lord, over and above all the material riches that made up the temple. Alagi



accepted the recognition of her services to Bhagavān Shiva with great humility, and chose to spend the rest of her life serving the temple and the temple employees.

The second great contribution of Raja Raja Chola I was that he got the writings of the Nayanmar Saints collected. Some priests, who preferred Sanskrit, opposed the collection of these writings because they were in Tamil. By his action, Raja Raja Chola I showed that sacred writings do not have to be in Sanskrit, and they can be in any language because many Hindu Saints praised Bhagavān in other languages too. But he persuaded them to bring out ancient manuscripts that were locked inside secret temple rooms. These hymns were carefully compiled into nine volumes. A century later, a 12th volume was added to them. These twelve volumes are collectively called ‘Tirumurai’ are regarded as holy books by Tamil speaking worshippers of Shiva. Till his times, Hindu temples had images of Devis and Devatas only. But thanks to Raja Raja Chola I, temples began to install mūrtis of Shiva and popular Hindu Saints too. As a result, Hindu Dharma became very strongly rooted in South India.

7.6 Rajendra Chola I (1014 – 1044 CE)



After Raja Raja Chola I, his son Rajendra Chola I created the most powerful Hindu empire of his times. He is regarded as one of the greatest Hindu emperors. He built a powerful navy that defeated and occupied the entire island country of Sri Lanka and also parts of present day countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. His armies moved along the eastern coast of India and defeated the Buddhist king of West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh. He brought pitchers of the sacred water of Ganga from the Pala kingdom, and poured them into a temple tank in his kingdom. Practically all the territory in

various countries around the Bay of Bengal was either conquered by him, or accepted him as their king. Therefore, it is said sometimes that the Bay of Bengal became the ‘Chola Lake’ under the rule of Rajendra Chola I.

Due to Chola domination, Tamil Hindu merchants came to dominate the ocean trade in that region. Rajendra Chola – I constructed a new capital city and also repaired and constructed several new temples. He got many ponds and lakes dug for the benefit of farmers. One of these lakes was 16 miles long and 3 miles wide.

The Chola government ruled the country very efficiently. Villages could take their own decisions and their chiefs were elected. In other words, the government at the level of villages followed democracy. Detailed records on copper plates were kept and several hundred thousands of these copper plates exist even today. Historians read these plates and with their help, we have been able to understand a lot about the Chola Empire.

7.8 Anandapāla Shāhī’s Guru Dakshiṇā to his Guru Ugrabhūti Bhatta

From the 7th to early 11th centuries CE, the regions today occupied by Muslim Pathans in North West Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan were Hindu territory ruled by Hindu Shahi dynasty with their capital moving between Kabul, Peshawar and other cities. King Anandapala Shahi ruled this kingdom from 1001 – 1010 CE (see the map of his



kingdom). His Guru Ugrabhuti Bhatta was a renowned scholar of Sanskrit grammar and he wrote a very learned book on this subject. The neighboring Hindu kingdom of Kashmir (to its east) was also famous for its scholarship. Therefore, King Anandapala sent copies of his Guru's work to the Kashmiri scholars in the hope of promoting it.

But the Kashmiri Hindu scholars were very snobbish in those days, and they did not easily adopt books that were written by others. Ugrabhuti Bhatta was therefore disheartened, but his student Anandapala came to his help. He announced that he will distribute 200,000 gold coins and many other gifts to Kashmiri scholars who would study the work of his Guru. The Kashmiri scholars fell for this gift, and as a result, Ugrabhuti's work acquired great popularity in Kashmir.

This act of Ugrabhuti to promote the beautiful work of Guru had a lasting effect. Within two decades, his own kingdom was completely overrun by Mahmud Ghazni, the fanatical Muslim king of Ghazni. Mahmud eradicated Hindu Dharma from his kingdom to the best extent possible, destroying temples, slaughtering Brahmanas, burning Hindu scriptures and forcibly converting many Hindus to Islam. Hindu learning practically ceased to exist in Afghanistan and the NW parts of Pakistan. But it took at least 3

more centuries for Muslims to gain the political control of Kashmir. Even thereafter, Hindu learning in that Kashmir survived right down to the present times. And there also survived the beautiful Sanskrit grammar work of Ugrabhuti. Due to the magnanimity of Anandapala, his Guru's work continued to be used as a textbook of Sanskrit grammar in some regions of northern India right down to the early 20th cent. CE.

Discussion: Most of you will not grow up to become Kings and Queens. But when you start earning, there are many ways in which you can promote education in general, and also support the work of your favorite teachers. Can you list some ways in which you can do that?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7.9 King Chandrāpīḍa begs a poor man for his land

King Chandrāpīḍa of Kashmir was famous for his fairness, justice, philanthropy and wisdom. One day, he called his chief architect and said, "I wish to construct a fabulous temple. Please go around my kingdom and select the best spot for its location."

After a few days, the architect returned and said, "We did locate a perfect spot for the temple. But a portion of that land is owned by a cobbler. He is refusing to part with his land. We offered him a lot of money but he says that he will not vacate his land and will not sell it either."

The King asked the cobbler to appear in his court. When the cobbler reached, the King said, “I am willing to pay you an enormous amount of money to buy your plot of land. Legally, I can confiscate your land as I am the King of Kashmir. But I want you to name your price.”

The cobbler folded his hands in reverence and said, “Your majesty, I have inherited this land from my forefathers. My father, grandfather, great-grandfather etc. all took birth on it and spent their lives on it. Therefore, this piece of land has great sentimental value for me. How can I sell it? Will you ever sell your ancestral possessions? However, I do not want to hinder the construction of the temple because the Devas will get displeased with me and my ancestors. Therefore, I can gift the land to you. Please come tomorrow, and beg me for the land, and I will gift it to you. By gifting it, the good Karma will benefit me and my forefathers.”

The courtiers were shocked when they heard the insolent cobbler. They started whispering, “Just see the arrogance of this petty cobbler. He wants our King to go and beg him for that land.” The King said nothing and dismissed the court.

Discussion:

Make a list of some of the qualities shown by the Kings in this chapter. Which of these qualities can we commoners, who are not Kings or Queens, practice in our daily lives?

8. The Devotees of Shiva, Ganesha and Kārttikeya from South India

8.0 The Nayanmar Saints:

From 500 – 900 CE, there lived in Tamil Nadu 63 saintly bhaktas of Shiva who came to be known as the Nayanmars. More than a quarter of the Nayanmars were Shudras or untouchables, and many of the remaining were Vaishyas. This fact shows that in Hindu Dharma, bhaktas and Sants have arisen from all sections of our society. Around 1050 CE, Cekkilar compiled the writings and the biographies of these saints into 12 volumes. In this chapter, we shall study in brief the lives of a few Nayanmar saints. In the Indian state of Karnataka, Sant Bāsavannā spread devotion to Shiva. One of his greatest disciples was a lady named Akkā Mahādevī and we will study her life and teachings as well.

8.1 Karaikal Ammaiyar (the Mother of Karaikal)

In Southern India, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal, is the port of Karaikal. In the 6th century CE, there lived a rich merchant named Paramadattan. He married Punithavathi, who was a great Bhakta of Bhagavān Shiva. One day, some merchants visited Paramadattan and presented him with two delicious mangoes. Paramadattan took the mangoes home and gave them to Punithavathi saying that he will eat them later.

After sometime, a Sadhu who worshipped Shiva arrived and begged Punithavathi for some food. As she had great regard for all Bhaktas of Shiva, Punithavathi served him food with respect, and also gave him one of the mangoes.

Later, when her husband returned, he asked to be fed as well. She brought food and the second mango to feed him. Paramadattan found the mango to be extremely delicious, and requested her to bring the second of the two mangoes that he had given to her. But since she had given the other mango to the Sadhu, she became scared that her husband will be angry at her because he had no faith in Shiva and regarded all Sadhus as useless.

She prayed to Shiva for help. Miraculously, a second mango appeared in her hand. When she fed it to her husband, he asked, “I have not tasted a more delicious mango in my whole life. It could not have been among the two mangoes that I gave to you earlier today. Tell me the truth – where did you get this mango?” Punithavathi told him how Shiva had gifted her a mango to replace the one she had given to the Sadhu.



Paramadattan laughed and said, “If your Shiva can shower mangoes when you worship him, ask him to give you another one!” She did as told, and another mango appeared miraculously. But when Paramadattan touched this new mango, it vanished right from out of his hands.

Now, Paramadattan became scared of his wife. He thought that she was a witch. He left her and disappeared. After some time, Punithavathi discovered that Paramadattan had settled down in another

city where he had remarried and even had a baby girl from his new wife. His relatives asked him to take back Punithavathi as his wife but he refused.

Abandoned by her own husband, Punithavathi decided to devote her life to worship Shiva. But she was afraid that being a very beautiful woman, several men might harass her and ask her to marry them. Therefore, she prayed to Shiva, “Bhagavān, please change my looks to that of an ugly and an old woman so that I can worship you always without being disturbed.” Shiva knew that Punithavathi’s beauty was inside her beautiful soul, and she did not need external beauty to look pretty. Therefore, he granted her request and she became an ugly woman.

She wrote and sang beautiful hymns to worship Shiva. People worshipped and respected her as the ‘Mother (Ammaiyar) of Karaikal’ and the name stuck. In her old age, she visited Mount Kailash and had a darshana of Bhagavān Shiva. Shiva asked her to settle down in a place called Tiruvalangadu, where she sang the praises of Shiva for the rest of her life. Thereafter, her soul merged with Shiva.

Karaikal Ammaiyar’s life and songs are recorded in the Periya Puranam and Thirumurai – holy scriptures of the Hindus in the Tamil language, along with the biographies of 62 other Nayanmar saints.

Discussion: After reading this story, can you describe in your own words what “beauty” means?

8.2 Sambandhar (643 – 659 CE)

One of the greatest Saints of Shiva-bhakti, Sambandhar was born in 7th century in Sirkali, Tamil Nadu to a pious Brahmin Sivapada Hridayar and his virtuous wife Bhagavathiar. One day Sivapada Hridayar and his wife took the child with them to the temple tank in which they wanted to bathe. The child looked at the tower of the temple and began to cry.



Copyright © www.skandagurunatha.org

Devi Parvati appeared and fed milk of divine wisdom to Sambandhar. From the moment he drank the Milk of Wisdom (at the age of 3), he began to sing soul-stirring songs in praise of Bhagavān Shiva. Next day Sambandhar went to a place called Thirukkolakkā. He sang a hymn in praise of ‘Meaning of Vedas’, clapping his hands to keep time. Bhagavān Shiva, pleased with this, presented him with a pair of golden cymbals (percussion plates). Sambandhar began to sing, with the help of the golden cymbals. Sambandhar then went on pilgrimages.

Wherever he went, crowds of people followed him, joining him in the singing of bhajans. As he was just a little boy of eight years of age, enthusiastic bhaktas often carried him on their shoulders while he sang the bhajans. As he was a little child, his feet often became tired walking from temple to temple while singing bhajans. Bhagavān Shiva came in a dream to the priests of a Mandir, and asked that Sambandhar should be taken around in a palanquin when he was singing bhajans to the crowds of bhaktas.



Once, he came to the home of a great Shiva Bhakta known as Shivanesha Chettiar in the town of Mylapore close to the modern Indian city of Chennai. He learned that Shivanesha’s only daughter had died, but Shivanesha had loved his daughter so much that he had preserved her bones after cremation in a pot in his home. Sambandhar asked for that pot and prayed to Shiva to bring the girl alive. A miracle

happened, and as everyone saw in amazement, the daughter of Shivanesha arose from the bones and became a living human being.

After visiting a number of shrines and singing hymns in praise of Lord, Sambandar returned to Sirkali at the age of sixteen. There, many people urged him to get married because the Vedas commanded every human being to marry. Sambandhar agreed and was married to a beautiful girl. The marriage was conducted with great pomp. But soon after the marriage, Sambandhar and his bride went to Shiva Mandir in her hometown. As Sambandhar sang a bhajan to the Shiva Linga, a beam of light emerged from the mūrti and the couple merged into that light and disappeared. Clearly, Bhagavān Shiva had taken Sambandhar and his wife to His own abode, and had granted them Moksha.

He is one of the most prominent of the sixty-three Nayanmars, Tamil Saiva Bhakti Saints. He wrote three hundred and eighty-four songs in praise of Shiva in the Tamil language. He contributed not only to the development of Shiva Bhakti but also to the development of music.

8.3 Appār



Born in 7th century A. D. he is considered as one of the most prominent of the sixty-three Nayanars. His childhood name was Marulneekiar (meaning "the dispeller of darkness or ignorance"). Even at a young age, Appār was very charitable. He became inspired by Jainism and its wonderful practice of Ahimsā. His sister Tilakavathiar was heart-broken over this change in her brother. She prayed to Lord Siva to reconvert Appār to Saivism.

Bhagavān Shiva gave Appār a severe stomach ache. The Jains were not able to cure his stomach ache. His Sister took him to Shiva Temple, and gave him holy ash. When Appār applied the ash, and sang in a praise of Shiva, the pain disappeared. A Divine voice said from the sky, "From now on you will be known as Thirunavukarasar (Lord of Speech). Your glory will spread everywhere. He became a Shaivite again.

But the ruler of the country, the Pallava king did not like the fact that Appār had reconverted to Saivism. He ordered Appār to be thrown into burning lime kiln. Accordingly, Appār was shut up in a kiln for seven days. He remained there, fixing his mind on the Lord and repeating Siva's name. By Shiva's grace, the heat of the kiln was transformed into a cool breeze.



The king ordered that Thirunavukarasar (Appār) be tied to a stone and thrown into the sea. Thirunavukarasar (Appār) sang hymns in praise of the Panchākshara Mantra, which is 'Om Namah Shivāya.' As soon as he

finished the song, the stone began to float on water and Appār was saved from drowning.

He heard of Sambandhar and went to Sirkali to meet him. Sambandhar respectfully addressed Thirunavukarasar as Appār which means ‘father’. Thereafter, he and Appār travelled together singing hymns. Appār is said to have travelled to about a hundred and twenty-five temples in different cities or villages in Tamil Nadu. He attained liberation at Pukalur in Tamil Nadu at the age of 81. About 3120 of his verses in praise of Shiva survive today.

DID YOU KNOW: Appār is always depicted as carrying a hoe – a long handled gardening tool. In his lifetime, he visited numerous temples and other public places, and was saddened to see how their pathways were dirty and overgrown with weeds. With his hoe, wherever he went, he would clean the pathways with love. The Saint’s example teaches us that we should keep our places of worship and other public places clean and must not hesitate to perform sevā to tidy them if needed.¹⁷ If a great Saint like Appār could do this manual task, we must not feel that we are too superior to do that.

8.4 Nandi Moves Away for Sant Nandanar

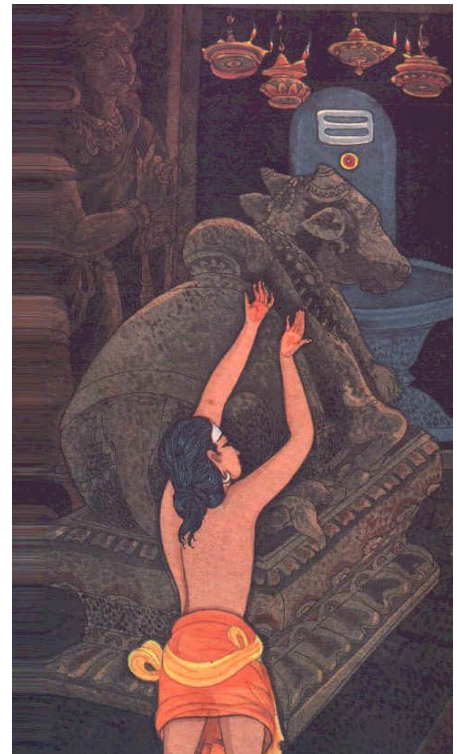
Nandanar was a great devotee of Shiva. But he was very poor. He worked on a farm as a laborer to earn money. In those days, laborers like him were treated as ‘untouchables.’ People would not allow these ‘untouchables’ to enter their homes, or the temples. The ‘untouchables’ were treated very badly. Everyone was very rude to them. Nandanar worked for a master, the farmer who owned the land on which crops were grown. This farmer was very cruel to Nandanar.

One day, Nandanar thought of going to a Shiva temple. He decided to visit the Thirupangur Shiva temple. But, the priests did not allow him to enter the Mandir because he was an untouchable. At the entrance of every Shiva Mandir, there is a Mūrti of Nandi, which is directly in front of the Shivalinga. The icon of the Nandi Bull at the entrance completely hid the view of the Mūrti of Shiva from outside. Therefore, Nandanar was unable to get a darshana (a view) of Shiva’s Mūrti. Nandanar became very sad. He cried that his cruel treatment by his master and the priests would become bearable if only he could get a glimpse of his Bhagavān Shiva.

Shiva was filled with compassion for Nandanar and his other low caste devotees. He commanded the icon of Nandi to move to the side to clear the view to Shiva’s image from outside. A miracle occurred. The image of Nandi moved to the side, and now Nandanar and all other low-caste devotees could have their divine darshana even if they were prevented from entering the shrine!

Even today, anyone can go to this temple and see that the Mūrti of Nandi is not directly in front of Shivalinga. It is to the side. This allows everyone to have a darshana of Shiva directly from outside.

This miracle shows that Bhagavān loves everyone – whether he is rich or poor, commoner or a priest, intelligent or a dullard. Therefore, we should respect and love everyone. We should not stop anyone from entering our Mandirs, because Bhagavān wants everyone to get his darshana.



8.5 Sant Poosalar constructs a Shiva Temple in His Heart

In the town of Thiruninravur in Tamil Nadu, there lived a very good man named Poosalar. He was a great devotee of Shiva. He decided to construct a Mandir to Shiva and went around asking for donations. But, he was not able to get enough money from people. Therefore, he decided to construct a Mandir in his own heart.

¹⁷ Nandakumar, p. 93



He spoke to architects and made a list of all the materials that are needed to construct a temple. One day, he decided to pray to Shiva and laid the foundation of an imaginary temple in his heart. Every day, he would build a small portion of the temple in his heart, till the temple became bigger and bigger.

After several years, the temple in his heart was finally complete. Poosalar then decided on a date for inaugurating the temple. On that date, he would invite Shiva to come and live in the Shiva Linga that he had installed in his temple in the heart.

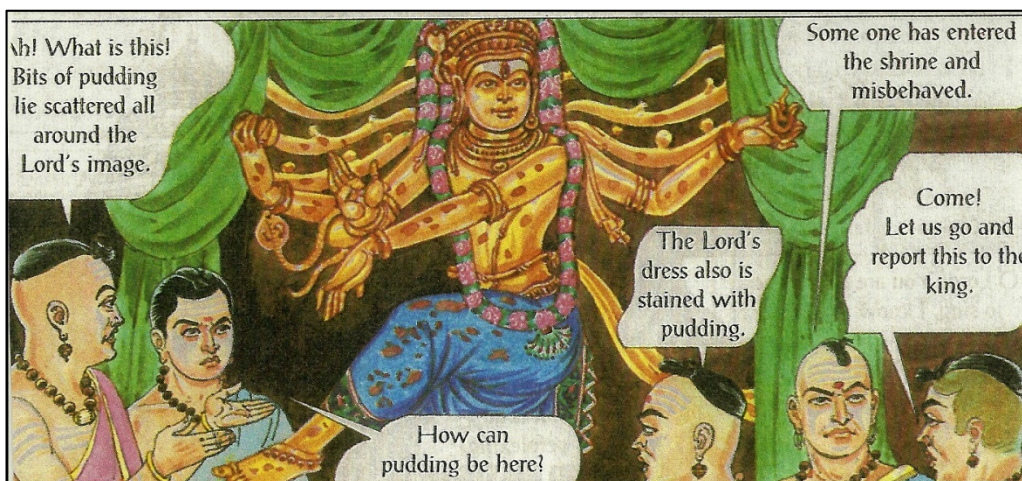
By chance, the King of that country had also constructed a Shiva temple in the city of Kanchipuram. And he too set the inauguration day of his Mandir on the same date as Poosalar had set for the temple in his heart. The King was very proud that he had built the greatest temple to Shiva in his country. Bhagavān Shiva thought, "The King is becoming too proud. Let Me teach him a lesson." So, Shiva appeared to the King in a dream the day before inauguration and said, "King, I cannot attend the inauguration of the temple you have built. Because on the same day, I am supposed to attend the inauguration of Poosalar's temple." The King was stunned. He thought, "Who is this Poosalar that Shiva prefers to visit instead of coming to my temple. Let me go and see if Poosalar's temple is greater than mine."



The king went around and asked for the location of Poosalar's temple, but no one had even heard of a temple like that. Finally, someone said to the king, "Why don't you visit that poor man in the hut, whose name is also Poosalar." The king went to the hut and asked Poosalar, "Have you constructed a temple for Shiva? It appears that Bhagavān Shiva prefers to attend your inauguration instead of mine. So where is your temple?"

Poosalar asked the king to place his ears on his heart. When the king did that, he heard the bells of the temples inside Poosalar's heart. And when he looked at Poosalar's chest carefully, he noticed that the temple that Shiva was going to visit was actually in Poosalar's heart. The king learned his lesson. He said to Poosalar, "Shiva likes your temple in the heart more than my huge temple made of stone. This is because you constructed your temple with love and devotion for Shiva. I promise to you that I will get a stone temple constructed for Shiva in your name. And till your temple is not inaugurated, I will not open my own temple." The king kept his promise, and the temple that he built for Poosalar to worship Shiva still exists in Tamil Nadu.

Discussion: What do you learn from this beautiful story?



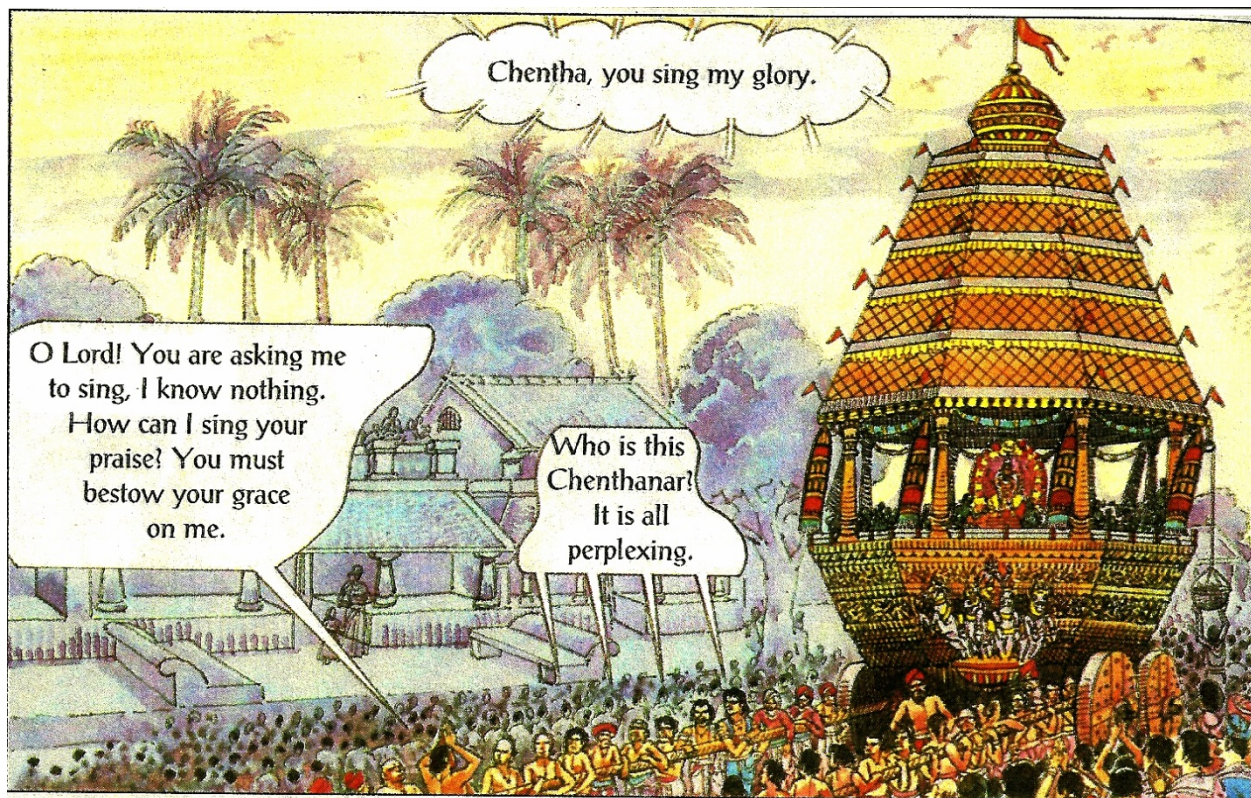
8.6 Chenthanar

Several centuries ago, when the city of Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu was ruled by Chola emperors, there lived a poor wood-cutter named Chenthanar. Every day, he would use a portion of his sales to buy food for a devotee of Shiva. One day, it rained very

hard as a result of which all the wood became wet and he was not able to earn anything. However, he made some pudding with millet grains and worshipped Shiva, hoping that a devotee of Shiva would come his way. A Sadhu suddenly appeared and Chenthanar fed him lovingly, seeing him to be a Bhakta of Shiva as well.

While leaving, the Sadhu remarked that the pudding was delicious, and therefore asked Chenthanar to give any left-overs to him as well. Chenthanar obliged, even though he had himself not eaten his dinner. Meanwhile, the King, who too was also greatly devoted to Shiva, would offer a Pūjā to Shiva every day, and the mūrti would jingle its anklets in acknowledgement of his worship. But that day when it rained, the anklets did not jingle. The King was very upset and thought, "Perhaps I did some mistake in my Pūjā today, which is why Bhagavān has not accepted my worship."

But that night, Shiva appeared to the King in a dream and said, "There was no flaw in your worship. I was just busy because I had gone to eat the pudding offered by the woodcutter Chenthanar, who is a great devotee of mine." The following morning, when the priests opened the gates of the famous Mandir of Chidambaram in which is housed the mūrti of Shiva in the pose of Natarāja, they were shocked. Bits of millet pudding were smeared all over the mūrti. The priests immediately sent a message to the Chola King, "Your majesty, it appears that a thief who hates Shiva entered the Mandir last night and threw bits of pudding on the mūrti of Bhagavān." But the King smiled and said, "No, it was his devotee Chenthanar who offered the pudding to Bhagavān. Surely, Shiva must regard him as his foremost Bhakta. I will issue orders to locate Chenthanar and request him to appear in my royal court so that all of us can offer our respects to this great Bhakta."



The men sent by the King searched but they could not locate Chenthanar. After a few days, there was a great annual chariot festival of the Nataraja Mandir of Chidambaram and Chenthanar too came to witness it in the crowd. The chariot had hardly gone much further that its wheels got stuck in the mud that had formed due to heavy rains that year. All of the devotees tried with all their might, but the wheels would not get unstuck from the mud. Suddenly, there was a thundering roar from the heavens, "I am Shiva, and I will not move till Chenthanar sings out a hymn of worship to me." No one knew who Chenthanar was, till he came forward and sang a beautiful hymn of devotion to Shiva. The chariot got unstuck immediately and it started moving. When the King found out about this, he and all his courtiers fell at the feet of the humble woodcutter and paid their respects to him for earning the grace of Shiva. The

King then told Chenthanar about his dream. Chenthanar was moved by the love of Bhagavān for him, and thanked Him for being so gracious even though he had merely offered a poor man's food to Him and His devotees.

Even today, the Shaivite Hindus of Tamil Nadu commence their prayers to Shiva with 12 hymns, of which the ninth is the one sung by Chenthanar in the Chidambaram chariot festival.

8.7 Bāsaveshvara: An Avatāra of Nandi



In the Indian state of Karnataka, around the year 1105 CE, a noble couple went to a Mandir of Shiva, and prayed to Him to bless them with a son. A few days later, when the wife was meditating in front of the mūrti of Nandi in the Mandir, she saw a light come out of it and merge in her. A few months later, she had a baby boy. They named him Basava – which is another name for Nandi.

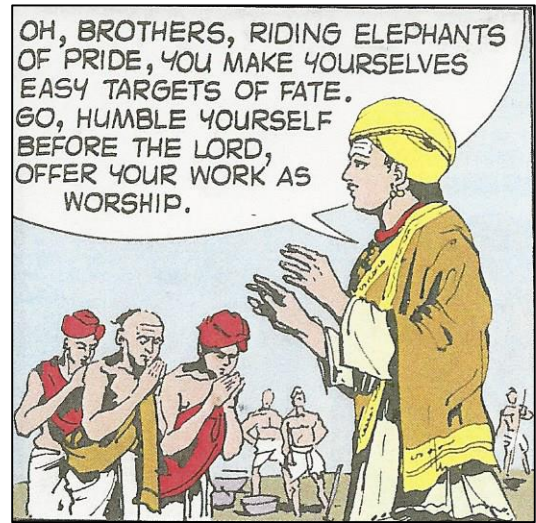
Unfortunately, Basava never spoke a word even as a child, and did not cry or laugh or even open his eyes. The parents got worried. But one day, a visiting Sadhu came and said, “Basava does not speak because he has been in meditation since he was born. I will bring him out of meditation.” Then, he changed ‘Om Namah Shivāya’ in Basava’s ear. Immediately, Basava opened his eyes! Thereafter, he behaved like a normal child, except that he was extremely devoted to Bhagavān Shiva.

As a child, Basava was pained to see that some people of the Hindu society were discriminated against and were not even allowed to enter Shiva temples. Basava believed that all Bhaktas of Shiva are equal in Bhagavān’s eyes. Therefore, he refused to wear the sacred thread

around his left shoulder, that other Brahmins like him wore. He did not want to appear a superior Brahmin compared to other Shiva bhaktas. At a very young age, he studied and mastered all the Hindu scriptures from a Guru named Jātaveda.

When he was an adult, he moved to Kalyana, where he took employment under King Bijjala. One day, an inscription was found with something written on it in an ancient language that no one could read. Basava came forward and read the inscription, which said that a treasure was buried under the King’s throne! When the throne was moved away and the spot dug up, vast treasure was found underground.

King Bijjala was very impressed with Basava and said, "Basava, I want you to become my treasurer and use my wealth for the good of the people of my kingdom." Basava agreed. He employed people to dig tanks and canals in the area, so that they could store and use water to grow more food. He ordered that everyone must work with their hands, whether one was a priest, a rich man or a poor man. Some people hesitated to labor in this task, saying, "We are rich and are born in noble families. Therefore, it is below our dignity to work like lowly laborers." But Basava told them, "Working with one's own hands is the best worship that you can offer to Shiva. Therefore, everyone must work. No one must live on the hard work of others." Once, there was a drought in the kingdom. Basava spent a lot of money to feed starving people.



In those days, it was a custom to kill goats and lambs in temples of Devī. Basava stopped this cruel practice and said that nothing pleases Bhagavān more than a person who loves and has compassion for all living creatures.



Soon, many people became impressed with the noble character and teachings of Basava, and they became his followers. His followers included people from humble backgrounds, like fishermen, boatmen and so on.

Every evening, Basava used to hold a meeting of all his followers and feed them lovingly. Everyone was treated equally, and had to sit together to eat the dinner. Thereafter, they met together, whether men or women, rich or poor, high caste or low caste, and discussed spiritual matters as a group in a hall. This made some people of the kingdom angry. They said, "How can the rich eat with the poor, and how can the high caste people eat in the same row as the low caste people? They must eat separately. The high caste and the rich must be seated at a higher level or in front of the others." They went and complained falsely to the King that Basava was using money from the treasury for his own enjoyment. But when the King checked the accounts of his treasury, the charge was found to be false. King Bijjala then gave Basava even more money to spend on his activities.



One day, a race of bulls was held. The King was also present at the event. Suddenly, a child came with his toy bull of clay and said, "I want my bull to join the race too." Everyone laughed at the innocent child. But Basava said, "His bull can take part in the race too. May Bhagavān Shiva bless this boy's bull and make it victorious." A miracle happened. The toy bull started running on its own, and defeated all the real bulls! Everyone present realized that Basava was a saint.

Basava taught that everyone was equal, and it was wrong to look down upon some people because they were born in a so called low-caste. He asked all his followers to carry a small Shiva-linga that they

hung from their necks and worshipped daily. Everyone used the same ceremonies to worship Bhagavān Shiva. He taught that it is better to be a good person, and give up evils like anger and greed than show off by performing expensive Poojas. His main teaching was that it is love for Shiva and pure character that make us great, not wealth or birth in a powerful family.



In those days, there was a community of people called ‘untouchables’ with whom other people did not eat or live, or married their children to. Basava asked people to stop practicing these discriminatory rules. Not only did he eat with the ‘untouchables’ himself, but he also asked his followers belonging to different castes to marry their children to each other. One day, King Bijjala received the complaint that Basava, a Brahmin, had eaten at the home of an untouchable Sharana (a Sadhu devoted to Shiva). Basava appeared with the Sadhu in the court and said, “The same blood flows through the body of an untouchable as well as the Brahmin. I believe that all human beings are equal. This Sadhu is a great bhakta of Shiva, and therefore he is better than the so called Brahmins who do not

have any love for Bhagavān.”

Basava’s critic then taunted him and said, “Are you saying that this untouchable is superior to us Brahmins? In that case, does milk flow through his veins, and merely blood in our veins?” Basava immediately took out his sword, and cut the top of the finger of the Sadhu. Everyone was surprised to see milk coming out of the untouchable Sadhu’s cut finger. Seeing the miracle, they became quite and had no choice but to agree that the untouchable Sadhu was a holy man due to his devotion to Shiva.

Unfortunately, his teaching that all humans were equal did not go well with many people of his society. They complained to King Bijjala constantly. Therefore, Basava moved to the Shiva Mandir in a place called Kudala Sangama, away from Kalyana, and spent the last days of his life there.

Question: What do you think are the main teachings of the life of Basaveshvara?

8.8 Akkā Mahādevī

Akkā Mahādevī was a beautiful daughter born around 1130 CE to a couple who were great devotees of Shiva and lived in the Indian state of Karnataka. From her childhood, she enjoyed worshipping Shiva and even wanted to become a Sannyāsinī, i.e. renounce the regular life of a world and devote herself fulltime to worship and meditate upon Shiva.

Mahādevī grew to become a beautiful woman. Kaushika, the ruler of her town, got attracted by her beauty and proposed to her. But she refused, saying that she had already married Shiva in her heart. But, Kaushika would not give up. Her parents were very worried that Kaushika being their King, would make their lives miserable. To console them, she said, “Please dress me like a bride, and send me to his palace. I will marry him if he agrees to become a Bhakta of Shiva.”

They agreed. Upon reaching the palace, Akkā Mahādevī put her condition, but he refused, saying, “What do you think of yourself? You are my citizen and I can marry you by force if you refuse.” He walked to her and started pulling her clothes. Akkā Mahādevī prayed to Shiva to protect her.

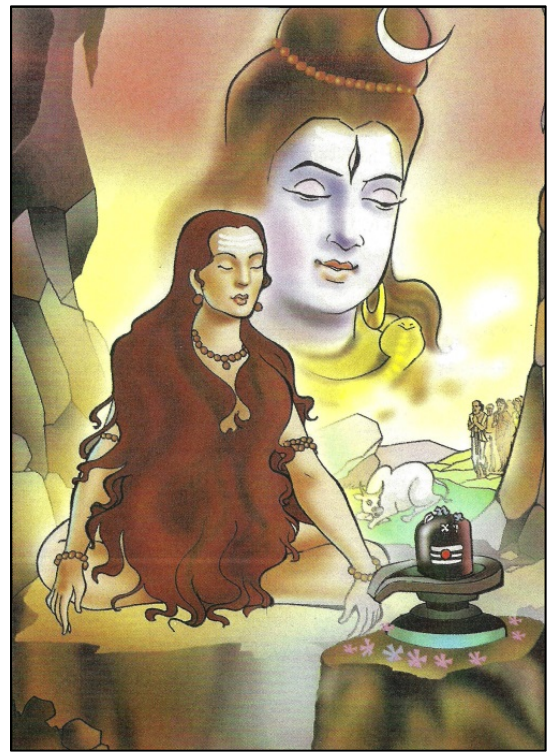


Miraculously, a ball of fire appeared between her and King Kaushika and started burning him. Frightened, he left her immediately. Akkâ Mahâdevî said to him, “I forgive you. But it is really sad that you only saw my physical beauty but were blind to the power of a Bhakta’s soul that appeared as the ball of fire.” Kaushika repented and fell at her feet to ask for forgiveness.

Akkâ decided to live the rest of her life as a Sannyāsinī. But, the society around her did not agree to her decision because in those days, women were not allowed to wander as ascetics and were expected to get married. She had heard that in the city of Kalyan in Karnataka lived another great Bhakta and saint of Shiva named Bāsava and his famous student Allāmā Mahāprabhu who were fair towards women and poor and low caste Hindus. She appeared in front of them in their academy where several scholars had gathered to discuss spiritual matters.

They questioned her on her knowledge and experiences related to Shiva, and announced that Mahâdevî was a great saint. She became a disciple of Saint Bāsava herself, and started living in a cave that was a few miles from the famous Shiva temple of Mallikārjuna.

Akkâ Mahâdevî composed beautiful hymns in praise of and for worshipping Shiva. These hymns are known as ‘Akkâ Mahâdevî Vachanas’ and are very popular even today. She also wrote a few books on Yoga and Bhakti. Her writings show that she was a great scholar of Sanskrit scriptures, and had advanced a lot spiritually in her life.



Her life teaches that one does not have to be a man to devote our life to Bhagavān. Women are equally eligible because the ātmā inside us is neither male nor female.



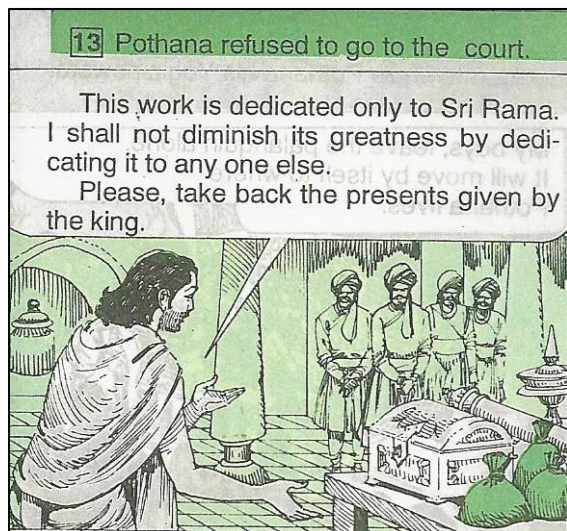
8.9 Pothana

Pothana (1400 – 1475 CE) is considered one of the greatest saint poets in the Telugu language. He was born in a family of Brahmana farmers in Warangal in the state of Telangana in South India. He had a natural inborn talent of composing beautiful verses in Telugu even as a little child.

Pothana was greatly devoted to Bhagavān Shiva. Once, he was meditating on Shiva when Bhagavān Rama appeared to him in the garb of a King and said, “Pothana, you are a great poet. I want you to translate the Shrimad Bhāgavata

Purāṇa into Telugu verses and spread its message.” Although Pothana worshipped Shiva, he decided to translate this Purāṇa, which is devoted to Bhagavān Viṣṇu.

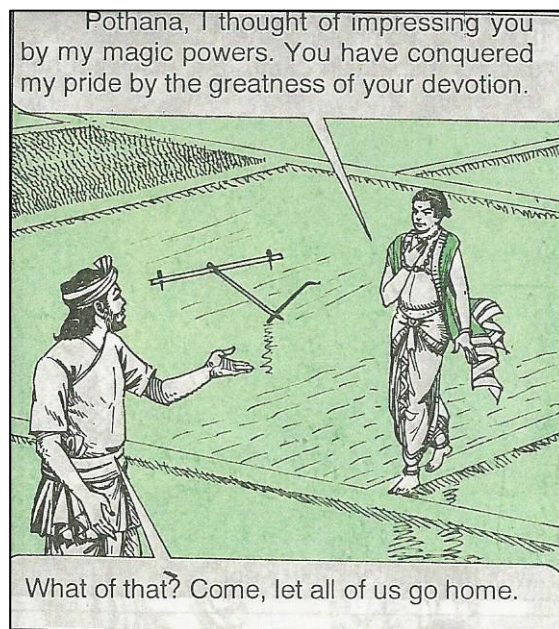
Pothana’s Telugu work came to be known as Andhra Mahā Bhāgavatāmu. It had beautiful poetry and soon, several people began to read it and sing its verses. When the King of Warangal came to know of Pothana’s Telugu work, he sent a message, “Poets must dedicate their writings to their King. Therefore, you must also dedicate your work to me, and add a verse in my praise at the beginning of the book.”



from the plough. Miraculously, the plough still continued moving to till the field! When Pothana’s cousin saw that, he halted the palanquin, and got off to apologize to Pothana. He said, “I thought that through my magical powers, I will impress you and convince you to dedicate your book to the King. But it looks like you have even greater powers than I have.”

Meanwhile, the King got very upset that Pothana had refused his request. Therefore, he started troubling Pothana in various ways. He sent some soldiers to arrest Pothana. But Bhagavān Viṣṇu appeared as a boar and chased them away. Then, the King ordered that Pothana’s house be burned down. But instead, the King’s palace caught fire. Finally, the King ordered the village to force Pothana to leave and settle down somewhere else. But soon after Pothana had left his village, an enemy attacked Warangal and the King lost a lot of territory and wealth. Now, the King realized that he had harmed a saint. He approached Pothana and begged him for forgiveness. Moreover, he gifted the village where Pothana had lived to him.

Pothana’s cousin thought that if he were to dedicate the Andhra Mahā Bhāgavatāmu to the King, the latter would get pleased and would give expensive gifts to Pothana. He tried to convince Pothana, but Pothana did not agree. Pothana believed that there is no one greater than Bhagavān. Therefore, why should one dedicate it to a King on this earth, instead of to Bhagavān – who is the Lord of the Universe? To impress Pothana and convince him, his cousin thought of showing off his yogic powers to Pothana. One day, he asked his servants to take him on a palanquin. When they reached Pothana’s village, he asked his servants to leave the palanquin. They did so, but the palanquin started flying in the air towards Pothana. At that time, Pothana was ploughing his fields with the help of his son and two bullocks. When Pothana saw his cousin coming towards him in a flying palanquin, he asked his son to free the bullocks



Pothana composed many other works in praise of Bhagavān Viṣṇu. His Gajendra Moksha story in particular is recited by Telugu speaking people even today because it is written in beautiful verses that inspire devotion for Bhagavān Viṣṇu.

8.10 Molla

Atukuri Molla (1440 – 1530 CE) was born to a humble potter Keshava, who lived close to the city of Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh. They were very staunch worshippers of Bhagavān Shiva, and were followers of the teachings of

Basaveshwara. But like Pothana, she decided to write on a theme related to Bhagavān Vishnu. She regarded Shiva as her Guru, because she did not receive much formal education from any teacher. And like Pothana, she did not dedicate her work to any King. Molla lost her mother when she was a child, and was raised very affectionately by her father, whom she salutes at the beginning of her Ramayana.



There is a very interesting story as to how she composed her Telugu Ramayan. Tenali Raman, who was a Minister in the court of King Krishna Deva Raya, once insulted a senior poet from Molla's village. To avenge the insult, Molla said that she will compose a verse Ramayan in Telugu within five days. Tenali laughed and said, "How can a woman, and that too a potter's daughter, compose the Ramayana in Telugu in five days?" But Molla was unfazed and she worked hard. Within five days, she composed a beautiful Ramayana in 138 verses of the Telugu language.

Her Telugu Ramayana was very easy to chant and ordinary readers could understand it without much difficulty. Soon, ordinary people in the region started singing it and her version of Ramayana became the most popular of all the other Telugu versions. In her own lifetime, her fame as a poetess spread so much that Emperor Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagara invited her to recite her Ramayan in her presence.

Discussion: Even though Pothana and Molla were worshippers of Shiva, they chose to write their most famous works on Bhagavān Vishnu and his avatāra Rama. What does this teach you about how Hindus see the relationship between the different Devi-Devatās?

Discussion: The first verse of Molla's Ramayana reads:

*My father Keshava was pious, friendly, devoted to his Guru and God.
Shiva's devotee, he (Keshava) was a guru in his own right.
I am God's gift to him, and they call me Molla.*

Why do you think Molla refers to herself as 'God's gift' to her father Keshava?

8.11 Yogi Vemanna

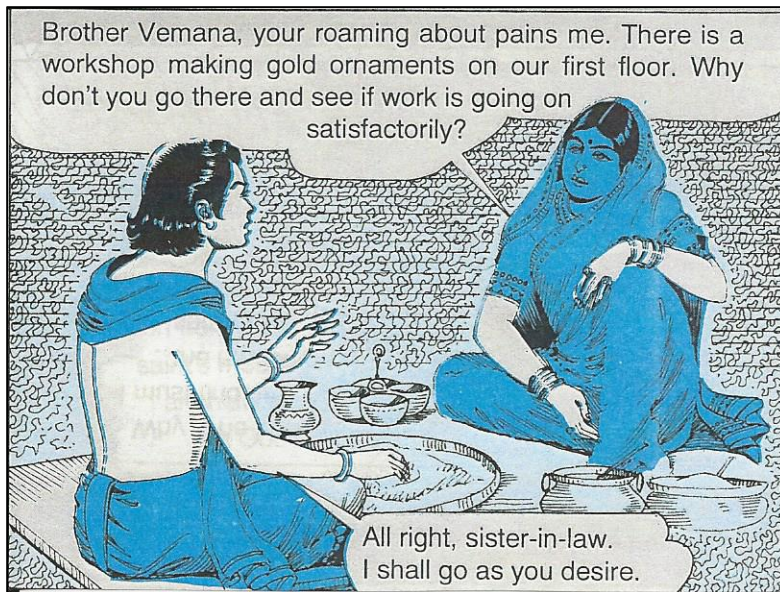
Vemanna Reddy was the youngest son of a local chief in the state of Andhra Pradesh in South India. He became a student of Lambika Shiva Yogi, a great Yogi and worshipper of Bhagavān Shiva. But, in his younger years, he was given to several bad habits and addictions. He wasted his time, seemed to show no purpose in life, and was in love with a dancer, with whom he spent many of his days and nights. He was also very rude towards others, due to which the people of his village stayed away from him. His family members greatly despised the Vemanna for his wayward behavior, except for his elder brother's wife.

Vemanna's sister in law constantly tried to bring back Vemanna to a life of hard work and useful purpose. One day, she suggested to him, "We have a goldsmith shop where several workers fashion ornaments for our

customers. Why don't you oversee the shop and make sure that everyone is doing their work honestly and punctually?" Vemanna agreed.

Although Vemanna was himself very careless about punctuality, he proved to be a very tough boss. In particular, he noticed that Abhirāma, the supervisor of the goldsmiths, always came late in the morning. Vemanna asked him to come earlier from the next day onwards. But, Abhirāma said, "Sir, I stay late to make up my hours. But I really cannot come earlier in the morning." Vemanna was surprised at this response, because he knew Abhirāma to be a very honest and hard-working employee. Therefore, to find out why Abhirāma could not come earlier to work, he decided to spy on him the following morning.

To Vemanna's surprise, Abhirāma actually got out of his home very early, much before sunrise. But, instead of going to work, Abhirāma went to a river for his bath and worship, and then went into a cave in a jungle close by. Vemanna followed him stealthily till he heard a Sadhu say to Abhirāma, "Dear Abhirāma, I am very pleased with your devotion to me all these years. Now the time has come for me to pass on my secret knowledge to you tomorrow.



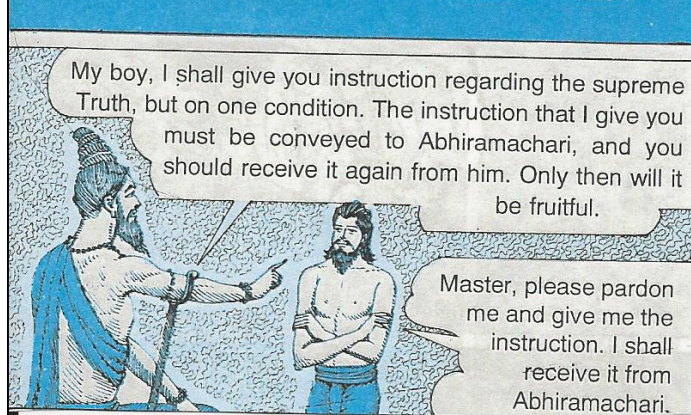
After I do that, I will pass away, but you will have many spiritual powers due to this secret knowledge." The Sadhu's name was Lambika Shiva Yogi.

Vemanna hit upon a plan to get the secret powers for himself. He asked his sister in law, "Please give Abhirāma some work that must be completed overnight, and requires him to work the entire night." She did as told, and poor Abhirāma worked with gold to create an earring for her the entire night. He reasoned, "Perhaps, it is not in my fate to get the secret knowledge for my Guru. But it is my duty to complete my employer's work even if I have to miss the

appointment with my Guru."

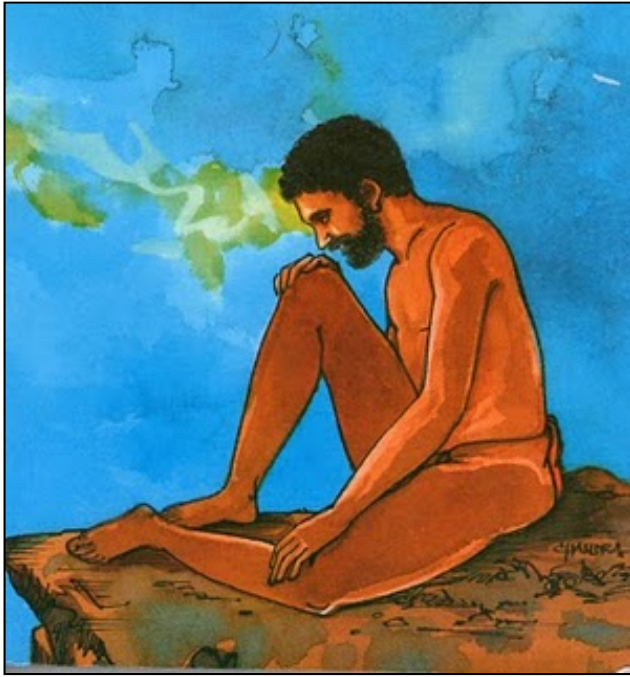
Meanwhile, Vemanna did exactly what Abhirāma used to do every morning. He took a bath, performed worship, and then appeared before Abhirāma's Guru in the dark cave. There, he said, "Respected Sir, for some reason, Abhirāma was not able to come today morning. He has sent me in his place instead. Please give me the secret

12 The all-knowing saint smiled within himself. He understood what had happened. But he also realized that Vemana who stood before him was also fit for spiritual illumination.



knowledge." The Guru sighed and said, "Perhaps, that is the way it was supposed to be. But listen carefully to all that I have to teach you. Then, you must go and teach all that to Abhirāma, and accept him as your Guru. And finally, request Abhirāma to teach the secret knowledge to you again. Till all that happens, the knowledge will be of no use to you." He taught Vemanna the secret spiritual knowledge, and then passed away.

With guilt in his mind, Vemanna rushed to Abhirāma and confessed how he had tricked him out to get the secret knowledge from his Guru. But, Abhirāma instantly forgave him and said, "At least, I



to teach through them:

A golden fruit looks attractive from outside, and appears delicious. But when we bit off a chunk, we can see worms inside it. Similarly, the mind of a coward is like a golden fruit. The coward pretends to be fearless, but within hides a lot of fear.....1

Salt and camphor look alike, but they taste totally different. Most men appear to have the same behavior, but they who are truly virtuous are different from the ordinary.....2

Discussion: In the life story of Vemanna, we see someone who had bad habits and was rude become a great saint. Can you think of other Hindu saints who were criminals or men of a low character in the early part of their lives?

8.12 Devar Dasimaiyya

In the 10th cent. C.E. in the Indian state of Karnataka, there lived a great devotee couple of Shiva by the name Devar Dasimaiyya and his wife Thukkalai Devi (also called Duggale). One day, she procured some spinning yarn of great quality. With prayers to Shiva on his lips, Dasimaiyya wove out a beautiful piece of cloth depicting the scenes from the stories of Shiva on it. Thukkalai suggested that they should use the cloth for adorning the Mūrti of Shiva in their local Mandir. But Dasimaiyya had other plans, "Let us sell this piece of cloth. We will get a lot of money and this will rid us of our poverty forever."

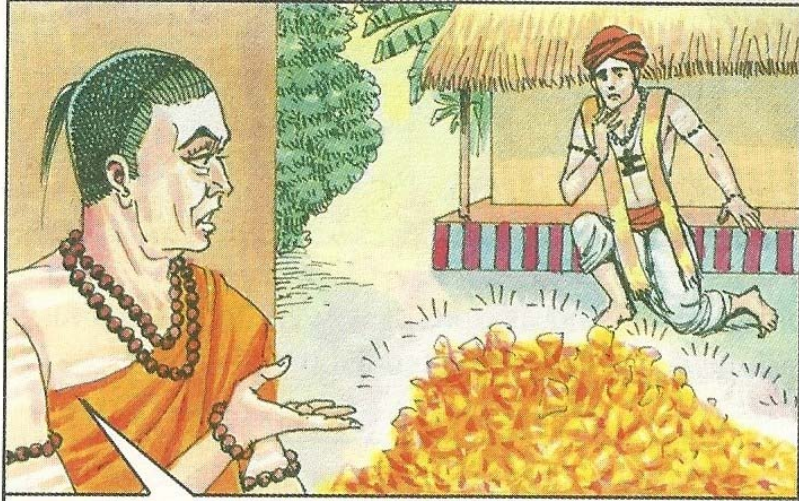
Dasimaiyya tried to find a suitable buyer but no one could pay enough to justify the excellent quality of the cloth. Finally one day, he saw a Sadhu who worshipped Shiva passing by, and offered the cloth as a gift to him. The Sadhu was overjoyed and in return, he said, "I have only some salt, grains, spices etc., that I had begged for. Let me give these to you." Dasimaiyya returned home with the Sadhu's gifts and his overjoyed wife put these food items in separate jars. Next day, she found that her food jars had miraculously turned 'never-emptying.' Whenever she withdrew some quantity of food from the jar, it filled back. The couple realized that it was none other than Shiva who had blessed them for their devotion. They became using the never-emptying food jars to feed devotees of Bhagavān every day.

too will get the knowledge from you. We will do as my Guru had instructed." Thereafter, Abhirāma accepted Vemanna as his disciple, and taught him that spiritual knowledge again.

A great change came over Vemanna. He was no longer the rude person or an addict who wasted his time or was in love with a dancer woman. Instead, he became very saintly and wise. Vemanna became a Yogi himself, like Abhirāma's Guru Lambika Shiva Yogi. He started roaming the entire Telugu speaking areas of India, composing beautiful four lined verses teaching good moral and spiritual values. In some of these verses, he states that he regarded three people as his Gurus: Abhirāma, his sister in law, and Lambika Shiva Yogi.

Discussion: Vemanna's verses have a secret meaning and almost 4000 of them survive today. Let us read two of them, and see if you can explain what Vemanna is trying

But after some time, pride entered the mind of Dasimaiyya and he began thinking, “There is no greater giver than Shiva, and there is no greater receiver of his blessings than I.” Shiva then decided to teach him a lesson in humility. There lived another saintly couple, Shankara and his wife with their students. The group toured Mandirs of Shiva frequently in South India. One day, they passed by the village of Dasimaiyya and stayed close to his home. Dasimaiyya was very impressed by their Bhakti towards Shiva. In the morning, Shankara’s wife asked one of their students to go around the village and beg for alms. Dasimaiyya heard it and remarked to Shankara and his wife with a tone of arrogance, “Why do you want to go around and beg for food? Shiva has chosen me as His special Bhakta and has given



me a never ending supply of food. I can single-handedly take care of all His other Bhaktas.”

Shankara was taken aback by Dasimaiyya’s arrogance and he replied, “I am glad that you have been blessed by Shiva but it does not behove you to be arrogant. The same Shiva Who gave you a treasure can also take it back. Prosperity and poverty are all through the grace of Bhagavān alone.” Saying this, he picked some trash from a heap in front of them and flung it in the air. The trash

immediately turned into gold nuggets before falling back to the ground!

Dasimaiyya was startled and returned home to relate the miracle to his wife, and explained how this was a result of his insulting the saint with his pride. She had something else to tell him, “Our pots of food have stopped refilling on their own. Perhaps this is the result of the insult caused to the saint. We should go and apologize to the saint, and also ask Shiva to forgive us.”

The couple returned to Shankara who said, “Remember that all riches in life are the blessings of Bhagavān alone and you can retain them only till you remain humble. When a Bhakta becomes proud and arrogant, Bhagavān Shiva takes back his blessings. But you have realized your mistakes now and have learned the importance of humility in life. Therefore, Shiva will bless you back with sufficient food and resources.”

The pots of food in Dasimaiyya and Thukkalai started filling up again and they spent the rest of their lives feeding the Bhaktas of Bhagavān. Dasimaiyya himself became a great saint in his later stages of life and wrote beautiful poems in praise of Shiva. He spread the worship of Shiva among the wild tribes in the region that lived by hunting. He asked them to give up eating meat and instead earn their livelihood by extracting oil from seeds and selling the same. Under his influence, the local King also became a follower of Bhagavān Shiva.

8.13 Sant Vallalar cries out of Compassion for exhausted Bullocks

The compassion of Ramalingam Adigal Vallalar (1823 – 1874 CE): In the 19th century CE, there lived a charismatic saint Vallalar, close to the temple of Chidambaram. He opposed caste based distinctions among Hindus, promoted vegetarianism and Sevā, and feeding the poor as the best worship of Bhagavān. His sermons were very famous, and many people travelled from distance places to listen to him.

One day, a village headman from a village at a distance started from his home on a bullock cart to listen to the Swami's sermons. On the way, the bullocks felt hungry and thirsty, but the headman told the cart driver not to stop the cart lest they are late for the sermon. As soon as they reached the residence of Vallalar, the headman rushed in and bowed to the saint. But, the Swami just got up and went outside the room, surprising everyone because he never got up in the middle of a sermon.

When the Swami did not return after a long time, the assembled people went out to check. They saw that the Swami was feeding the bullocks some water and grass, and had tears in his eyes. He was telling the animals, "Because of me, you had to suffer, and had to go hungry and thirsty." When the village headman saw this, he realized his mistake, and fell at the Swami's feet. The Swami's act of piety and compassion made the headman realize that Bhagavān resides even in animals. Therefore, if we cannot be kind to animals, there is no use of attending spiritual sermons.



8.14 Sant Chidambar Dikshit teaches that worship and religion without compassion are useless

Swami Chidambar Dikshit was a saint who was born in the district of Belgaum in the Indian state of Karnataka in the 18th cent. C.E. Wherever he went, his devotees flocked to get his darshana, blessings and listen to his sermons.

One day, a childless woman visited him. She was known in that area as a very religious lady who performed numerous vows and fasts. But her heart was completely devoid of love and compassion for others. The woman said, "Swami-ji, for many years I have been worshipping and performing various rituals to obtain a child. But Bhagavan has not answered my entreaties. Therefore, I have come to you for your blessings in the hope that I will become a mother soon."

The saint gave her two fistfuls of roasted gram and said, "Please take a seat over there, and come to see me when I call you." The woman did as she was told and started chewing the gram. Before long, a bunch of street urchins came to her and started begging for a few of her roasted gram. The lady said, "Go away. If I give to one, all of you will start begging for them." She covered her face with her saree and continued eating the gram while the hungry kids kept asking her for food.

Swami Chidambar Dikshit called her and said, "When you cannot give even a few pieces of gram received by you in free to hungry children, then do you think that Bhagavan will listen to your prayers and give you a real living child? Bhagavan is never pleased with mechanical rituals and worship if they are performed by a person who has no love or compassion in his heart."¹⁸



¹⁸ Chaitanya and Chakra, pp. 549-550

8.15 The Mercy of Bhagavān Kārttikeya on Alagumuttu Pulavar:

More than 200 years ago, in the Kārttikeya Mandir at Nagai, there worked an accountant named Alagumuttu. He was a great devotee of Kārttikeya. Every night, after his work was done, he took a little prasāda from the Mandir and then went to sleep without eating any dinner. One night, he went to the Mandir for the evening worship and fell asleep there without eating anything. Late in the night, when he woke up, he discovered that he was now locked inside. He was feeling really hungry, but there was no food and no one to get him out of the Mandir. He prayed to Bhagavān Kārttikeya to rescue him. Suddenly, a priest appeared with some food for him. Alagumuttu ate hungrily and then thanked the priest.

Then, the priest asked Alagumuttu to sing a religious song in praise of Kārttikeya. But he replied, “I do not know how to sing. Also, I do not know any songs to praise Kārttikeya. I am not very well educated, so please do not ask me to write any new song either.” But the priest insisted. When Alagumuttu tried to sing, he was surprised to see that all of a sudden, he could sing very beautifully. And not only that, he could also sing songs that no one had ever taught him. Alagumuttu was surprised and asked the priest, “What did you mix in the food? And who are you? How did I become so intelligent and so good a singer suddenly?” The priest revealed his form – he was none other than Kārttikeya. Bhagavān Kārttikeya then said, “I am very pleased with the love that you have for me. Therefore, I am gifting you the ability to sing beautiful songs to me in the Mandir, and also the ability to write new songs very fast.”

The next morning, when the priests opened the door, they noticed a light on the face of Alagumuttu. They realized that something very good had happened inside the Mandir the last night. Suddenly, Alagumuttu started to sing a prayer to Kārttikeya. Everyone was surprised to see that an accountant who had not studied much, and could not sing was now singing prayers to Kārttikeya so beautifully.



Clearly, this change was a blessing from Kārttikeya. Alagumuttu became famous for his songs in praise of Kārttikeya, although he had never learned music or the art of writing songs. When he died, he was far away from Nagai, but worshippers saw his soul come as a light to merge with the Mūrti of Bhagavān Kārttikeya in the Nagai temple!

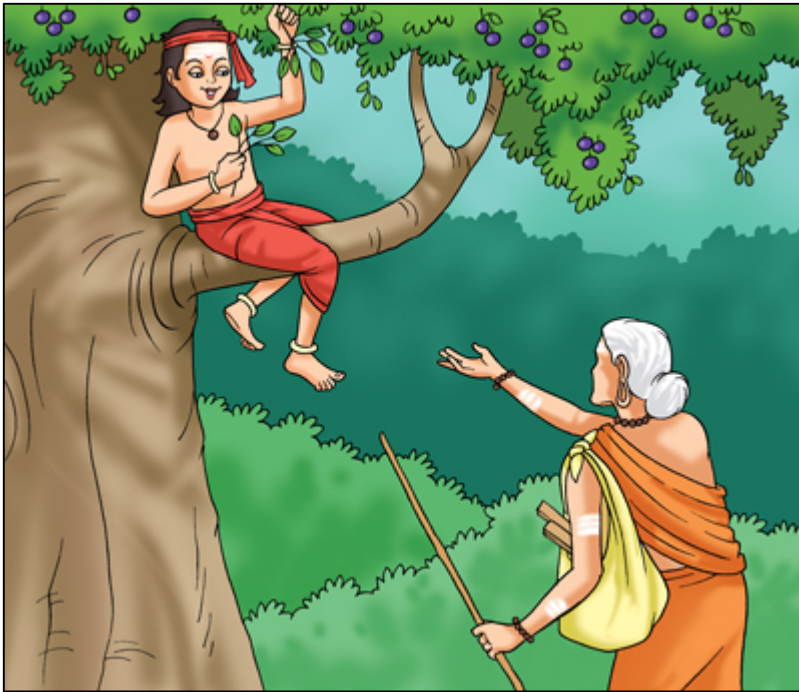
8.16 Avvaiyar

One day, Devi Sarasvati decided to live on the earth as a human being to experience how life was in our world. She was born as a beautiful daughter named Avvaiyar to a very religious couple. From her childhood, she was deeply devoted to Bhagavān Ganesha. As she grew older, her parents wanted her to get married. But Avvaiyar wanted to spend her life worshipping Shiva, Ganesha and Kārttikeya. She prayed to Ganesha, “Bhagavān, please change my appearance from that

of a beautiful girl to an old woman. Then no one would want to marry me.” Bhagavān Ganesha granted her wish, and she became an old woman.

Avvaiyar now spent all her time worshipping Ganesha, and spreading the message of Hindu Dharma among the people of her country. People loved her, and her teachings. Children asked her to sing a song for them when they saw her. In fact, her name ‘Avvaiyar’ means ‘Granny’, which shows that everyone respected and loved her a lot.

Pleased with Avvaiyar’s bhakti, Bhagavān Ganesha appeared to her and said, “What boon can I give to you, lady?” Avvaiyar said, “Bhagavān, I will give you four things. But in return, I am requesting you to give me only three gifts. Does that sound like a good deal to you?”



Ganesha was pleased. He said, “Who can refuse your offer. But tell me first, what will you give to me?”

Avvaiyar said, “I will give you milk, jiggery, pure honey and lentils.”

Ganesha thought, “I love to eat, and we can make a lot of dishes out of these four items.” So he asked Avvaiyar, “I love your four gifts to me. Tell me now, what three things shall I give to you in return?”

Avvaiyar said, “I want you to give me the ability to write good poetry in Tamil, good prose in Tamil, and also good drama in Tamil.” Ganesha was impressed with Avvaiyar’s intelligence. He gave her all the three gifts.

Discussion: Who do you think got a better deal in the exchange – Ganesha or Avvaiyar?

Avvaiyar now became a famous writer of poems, prose and dramas. Many of her sayings still survive today. But as people began to praise her, she became a little proud of her fame. Bhagavān then thought of teaching her a lesson. One day, she was passing through a forest and felt hungry. She saw a tree laden with delicious fruit, and a boy sitting on a branch. She called out to the boy, "Can you pluck some fruit and throw them down to me? I am hungry."

The boy said, "Do you want the fruit cold or hot?" Avvaiyar laughed, "How can fruit growing on a tree be cold or hot?" The boy again asked, "I will throw fruit to you only if you tell me whether you want them hot or cold." Avvaiyar was very hungry and she just wanted to eat something. Therefore, she said, half-heartedly, "I want them cold." The boy immediately plucked a fruit and threw it on the ground close to Avvaiyar. The fruit got soiled with dust.

When Avvaiyar picked the fruit, she started blowing at it from her mouth to remove the dust. The boy laughed and said, "If you wanted a cold fruit, then why are you cooling it with your breath?" Avvaiyar realized that this boy was no ordinary person because he was very witty and intelligent. She prayed to him respectfully, "Tell me Sir, who are you?" And then, the boy revealed his true form as Kārttikeya to her. Avvaiyar thanked him for making her realize that she was being too proud of her wisdom.



When Avvaiyar became old, she travelled to Mount Kailash with the help of Bhagavān Ganesha to have a darshan of Bhagavān Shiva.

Avvaiyar taught people very good things in a very simple language. Some teachings of Avvaiyar are given below:

1. Control your anger.
2. Do not forget to give charity.
3. Do not live on free food (i.e. work to earn your living).
4. Do not be lazy.
5. Do not over-sleep.
6. Before eating a feast, feed the hungry.
7. Be humble if you want to win friends.
8. Take a bath regularly.
9. Make friends with good people.
10. Never leave your friends when they need you.
11. Keep away from evil people
12. Take care of your parents.
13. Do not hurt the feelings of others.
14. Be kind to people who need help.
15. Never insult Bhagavān.

Which of her teachings do you follow in your lives?

8.17 Tiruneelanakar Nayanmar & his Saintly Wife

A very beautiful story is narrated from the life of Nayanmar Tiruneelanakkar and his wife on the vātsalya bhāva of Bhakti. Once, the couple went to a Shiva Mandir to perform a worship, when they saw a spider fall on the Shivalinga. Immediately, the lady blew on it and the spider fell down and scampered away.



But her husband was furious and said to his wife, “Don’t you know that blowing at a Mūrti with your outbreath is a sin. I am very annoyed with you. From now onwards, you will no longer be my wife.” He abandoned his wife at the Mandir itself, and went home!

That night, Tiruneelanakkar had a dream in which he saw that the Shivalinga was covered with boils all over wherever the spider had sprayed its poison. But, there was one spot that was free of boils- the spot where his wife has blown her breath to remove the spider. In the dream, Shiva said, “Your wife blew away the spider out of the love that a mother has for her child. Like a mother, she ensured that the spider would not bite me. It was due to her love, that the spot where her breath hit my Shivalinga had no boils. Therefore, you should return to the Mandir, and bring your wife back. I am not upset with her. In fact, I deeply appreciate the maternal love that she has for me.”

Tiruneelanakkar woke up and rushed to the Mandir. He apologized to his wife and brought her back with honor.¹⁹

¹⁹ Nandakumar, pp. 115-116

9. The Devotees of Vishnu from South India

9.0 The Alvār Saints

In Southern India, today included in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, there lived twelve great Bhaktas of Vishnu more than 1000 years ago. These Bhaktas are collectively named as the Alvars. They wrote thousands of beautiful hymns praising Bhagavān Vishnu and his Avatāras, and about 4000 of them survive today and are sung musically. The first three of these Alvaras were Poygai, Pudatt and Pey-Alvar. The greatest of the twelve Alvars were Nammālvār whose 1000 hymns to Vishnu are regarded as holy as the Vedic scriptures, and Andal, a great woman Sant whose hymns to Krishna are chanted today every year in the month of Margazhi (December – January) by Vaishnava Hindu women in South India.

9.1 The First Three Alvārs: Bhagavān is always present with his Bhaktas

One day, Poygai Alvar arrived at a place called Tirukkovalur in Tamil Nadu. It was raining heavily. Suddenly, he saw a small thatched hut. To avoid getting soaked, he entered the hut, and finding it empty, he lay down on the floor and started chanting the praises of Vishnu. By a coincidence, Pudatt Alvar also arrived, and entered the hut to avoid getting drenched. Poygai got up and sat, to make space for Pudatt. After some time, Pey-Alvar also arrived, and the other two now got up and stood on their feet to share the small hut with the new guest.

The three men did not know each other. But very soon they discovered that they shared a common interest – extreme devotion for Bhagavān Vishnu. So they started composing beautiful hymns of devotion and began chanting them. While worshipping Vishnu with their hymns, they became emotional. Tears flowed from their eyes, and their hair stood on their ends. Suddenly they noticed that in addition to them three, there was a fourth person standing snugly with them in the hut, filling it with a Divine radiance and fragrance. They realized that it was none other than Vishnu, who was in the midst of them, listening to their hymns full of Bhakti. Each of the three Alvar saints then sang 100 hymns to Vishnu that they composed extempore, and these were collected in the Divya-Prabandham, the sacred scripture of the Shri Vaishnava Hindu community. The story of these three saints shows that whenever Bhaktas gather together to chant verses in praise of Bhagavān, he is always present with them even though He is invisible.

9.2 Nammālvār:



He is regarded as the greatest of all the twelve Alvārs along with Andal. He wrote 1000 of all the hymns of Alvārs in praise of Vishnu. It is said that he was born to a couple after they had prayed to Bhagavān Vishnu for a child. Bhagavān came to them in a dream and said that He will himself be born as their son.

But alas, the son that was born to them turned out to be strange. He never cried or smiled, or even opened his eyes. He never made any sounds from his mouth and showed no emotion or movement at all. Disheartened, the couple placed him under a tree outside the Vishnu temple in their own town, which was called Tirunagari. The boy walked into the hollow of the tree and started living in it.

The child continued in this state till he was about sixteen. Another Alvār Saint named Madhurakavi, while touring the city of Ayodhyā, saw a light in the southern direction. He followed it till he reached the sixteen year boy, sitting without any expression, as if meditating, beneath the tree. When Madhurakavi spoke to the child, he started talking for the first time. In fact, the boy started speaking

wise words as if he were a Saint himself. Madhurakavi was very impressed, and requested the boy to become his Guru.

Thereafter, the boy started composing his beautiful songs to Vishnu, and especially to his Avatāra of Krishna. Madhurakavi would set them to a melodious tune as they were being composed. The songs became very popular, and the boy became famous as 'Nammālvār' which means 'our own Alvār.' His original name is said to have been Shathakopa or Parāṅkusha.

In these 1000 songs, he explains the nature of Bhagavān, of the ātman that makes our body alive, the way by which the ātman can reach Bhagavān, what happens when the ātman reaches Bhagavān, and also what can prevent the ātman from reaching Bhagavān. His songs are so beautiful that they are said to be the Tamil version of the four Vedas that are in Sanskrit. Nammālvār lived for only 35 years, but his songs are sung even today with great respect.

In many temples of Vishnu, the priest places a cup with footprints embossed on it on our head when we bow to the mūrti. This cup represents Nammālvār, who is said to be the crown of the bhaktas of Vishnu (i.e., he is the best of all the bhaktas of Vishnu), and the footprints represent the feet of Bhagavān Vishnu.

9.3 Āndāl



Andal lived in the 8th century CE. Along with Nammalvar, she is considered the most important of the 12 Alvars. No one knows who her biological parents were. Shri Vishnuchitta, a pious Bhakta of Vishnu, found her one day in a bush of Tulsi plant (sacred to Vishnu) in his garden. He adopted the baby girl as his own daughter, and named her 'Godai' ('gift of mother earth'). Vishnuchitta himself is regarded as one of the 12 Alvars and is known as 'Periyalvar'.

Vishnuchitta lived in the city of Srivilliputtur, where he had the duty of delivering flower garlands to Vishnu's temple every day. Andal grew up in holy surroundings, worshipping the Vishnu and listening to holy discourses, Vedas, Epics, Bhajans, Keerthans, etc. From childhood onwards she listened to the Leelas (pranks) of Krishna with rapt attention and developed a deep love to the Lord. By her virtuous behavior, Godai became a master of the hearts of her father and her friends, due to which her neighbors gave her the name 'Andal' (meaning 'Ruler')

When Godai grew up, she made these garlands and sent it to her beloved Lord through her father. She started wearing the flower garland which was meant to be offered to the Lord secretly before sending it through her father. One day, she was caught red-handed by her father one day. Vishnuchitta went to temple empty handed that day and apologized to God for his daughter's behavior.

But that night, Vishnu appeared to him in a dream and said, "Periyalvar, the garland worn by your daughter has the sweet fragrance of her devotion and purity; that is the garland I love." Vishnuchitta realized that Divine Love existed between the Lord and his daughter. Andal declared that she will marry none other than Krishna. As years went by, Andal became even more and more devoted to Vishnu. She imagined that Srivilliputhir was Gokul where Krishna had spent his childhood, and that her friends were Gopis. One year, during the month of Margazhi (December-January), she kept a 30 day long vow. Each of these 30 days, she would deck herself as a bride, and sing a new song in praise of Vishnu.





Vishnu appeared in a dream to her father and said, "When the month of Margazhi is over, I want you to dress your daughter as bride and bring her to me in the temple." Periyalvar did as he was commanded, and took her to the Vishnu Mandir in a wedding procession. When Andal reached the temple, she transformed into a pillar of light and merged with Bhagavān Vishnu.

Andal composed two works in her short life. Her first work is Tiruppavai, a poem of thirty verses in which Andal imagines herself to be a cowherd girl and sang hymns about Lord Krishna. The second is the Nacciyar Tirumoli, a poem of 143 verses. Tirumoli, literally meaning "sacred sayings", is a Tamil poetic style in which the work is composed. Andal is now one of the best-loved

poet-saints of the Hindus in south India. She is present in many Vaishnava temples, in India and elsewhere, next to her Lord, as she always desired. As she was regarded as a gift of Mother Earth, she is also referred to as an incarnation of 'Bhoodevi' (Mother Earth). During the month of Margazhi, discourses (religious explanations by scholars) on the Tiruppavai in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English are given place all over India. A temple at her birthplace was constructed at Srivilliputhir, where Hindus go in large numbers to worship.



9.4 Ananthāchārya (12th century CE)



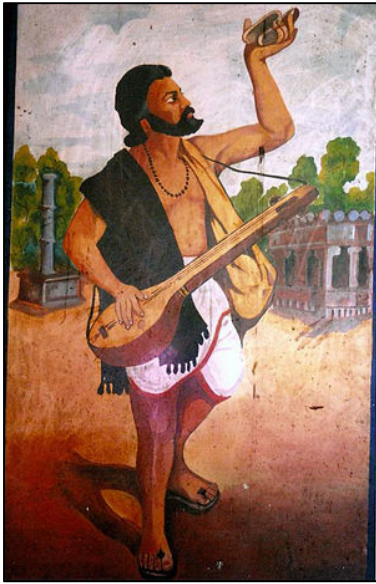
Every morning, a white paste of a material called camphor is applied to the chin of the Mūrti of Balaji in the Tirupati Mandir. It is said that several hundred years ago, Saint Ananthācharya and his wife used to look after a garden around the Mandir, and collect flowers for the garland for the Mūrti. One day, the wife was very tired while tending the garden, because she was expecting a baby. A young boy appeared, and started helping the lady. When Ananthācharya saw the boy, he became angry, thinking that the boy was a thief. He ran after the boy, and hurled his spade towards him. The spade hit the boy's chin, which started bleeding. The boy ran inside the Mandir, and disappeared.

The next day, when Ananthācharya took the garland of flowers to offer to the Mūrti, he saw that the chin of the Mūrti was bleeding. Ananthācharya felt very sorry, and bent down to ask Bhagavān for forgiveness. He applied the camphor paste to stop the bleeding and soothe the Deity's chin. And that became a daily custom in the Mandir from then on!

9.5 Sant Kanakadāsa

Kanaka Dasa was a humble cowherd who wandered from village to village singing the praises of Bhagavān Vishnu. Vyasateertha, a very famous scholar of Vedanta, took him as his student. Very soon, Kanakadasa became his favorite student.

The other students became jealous, because unlike them, Kanaka was not only from a very humble family, he was also not educated in scriptures. Vyasateertha decided to teach his students a lesson. He called all of them and gave them a banana each saying, "These are sacred bananas. If you eat them, you will be blessed. However, you must eat your banana in a secret spot where no one can see you. Then come back and tell me where you had eaten your banana."



After a day or so, everyone came back and reported that they had eaten their blessed banana at such and such spot. Surprisingly, Kanaka had still not eaten his banana. When Vyasateertha asked, Kanaka responded, "Reverend teacher, I was not able to find a single spot where God could not see me."

Vyasateertha looked at his students and said, "For you, God is merely something whose name is chanted by you in prayers. But for Kanakadasa, God is a real person whom he sees everywhere."

After sometime, Kanakadasa decided to start roaming again to sing the praises of Vishnu. One day, he arrived at the famous Krishna temple at Udupi, a town in the Indian state of Karnataka. It had been his desire for a long time to have a darshana of Lord Krishna at the temple.

Unfortunately, the priests refused him entry, saying that he was a lowly cowherd and therefore he could not enter the temple. Disheartened, Kanakadasa went to the rear wall of the temple and started worshipping Krishna from there. While the priest was chanting his Sanskrit prayers to Krishna inside, he saw a miracle happen. The Murti of the Lord started turning around. A hole appeared in the rear wall, and the face of the Murti gazed at Kanakadasa worshipping outside! Quite clearly, Krishna turned his back at the priest who had turned away his gentle and loving devotee Kanakadasa.

A window was later inserted into the hole through which Kanakadasa had a darshana of Krishna, and this window, which exists even today, is called Kanakana Kindi in honor of the saint. Even today, devotees have a darshana of Krishna through this window.

The story of Kanakadasa shows how a devotee always experiences God and knows that God sees him at all times. Likewise, God too always keeps an eye on his devotee who always sees Him.



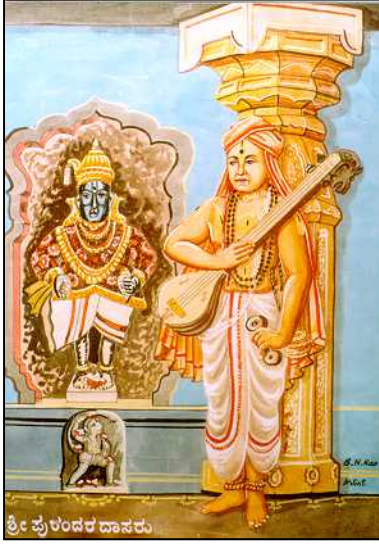
9.6 Purandaradāsa

Puranadara was born to a very kind trader and jeweler Varadappa Naik and his wife after the couple prayed to Lord Venkateshvara for a child. Varadappa was very wealthy, but he was also very kind towards the poor and needy. In his old age, he handed over his shop of gems and pawning to his son Sreenivasa and married him to a very pious wife Saraswati. Sreenivasa completely changed the nature of the business. He was a very business minded and a hard hearted person. He cared only about maximizing his profits, and did not give anything from his income in charity to the poor and the needy. He stuck very hard bargains with poor and had no pity over their condition. As a result of his miserliness and his business skills, the family business greatly prospered. Sarasvati, on the other hand, was a very kind hearted woman who liked to help the poor. But Sreenivasa forbade her to give anything in charity to anyone. Varadappa tried to make his son see the virtues of sharing and caring, but without success.

One day, Varadappa fell very sick. The physician suggested giving Varadappa the ash of some burned precious gems. But the miser son Sreenivasa simply rejected the idea of spending a lot of money to procure the gems. Saraswati tried to reason with her husband that his father's life was more precious than any gem, but he merely said – "Father is very old and will die one day anyway. Why waste money on the gems for getting the medicinal ash?"

Varadappa soon died. Sreenivasa continued his old ways of being a merciless pawn shop and amassed so much wealth that people gave him the nickname 'navakoti' or "the owner of 90 million."

One day, a poor Brahmana came to beg some money at Sreenivasa's shop for performing the thread ceremony of his son. Sreenivasa was by now a notorious miser. So he was surprised that someone had actually come to ask him for money. Instead of declining any help, he merely told the Brahmana to come the following day. When



the Brahmana came the next day, Sreenivasa asked him to come later. This kept repeating day after day, but the miser Sreenivasa would just not relent.

One day, while cleaning his shop, Sreenivasa found a box of fake and worthless coins. When the Brahmana came the next time, he gave that box of coins to him say – “This should be enough money for you to perform the thread ceremony.”

The Brahmana of course found out that the coins were fake and worthless. He decided to be elsewhere and coincidentally, landed up at Sreenivasa’s home. Sreenivasa was away in his shop, and the Brahmana said to Saraswati (not knowing that she was his wife or that it was his home) – “I went for six months day after day to this miser and heartless merchant begging for a small amount of money which I needed to perform my son’s thread ceremony. Finally, the cheat gave me a box of fake coins which were worthless. Could you help me?”

Saraswati of course realized who the poor Brahmana was referring too. She felt really ashamed at her husband’s niggardliness. But she had been forbidden by Sreenivasa to give anything in charity. Suddenly, she realized that the diamond nose-ring that she wore was gifted by her own mother. Therefore, it was not the property of husband and she could gift it to the Brahmana.

The Brahmana thanked the gracious lady with tears in his eyes. Then, he went to Sreenivasa’s shop and asked him to pawn it and give him some money instead for his son’s ceremony. When Sreenivasa saw the expensive nose-ring, he was perplexed because it was identical to what his wife wore. So he told the Brahmana to come the following day, giving the excuse that he needed a day to evaluate its price before he could pawn it and give money in return. He locked the nose-ring in his shop and went home for dinner.

At home, he asked his wife to produce her nose-ring. Saraswati was terrified. She was already disgusted with her husband’s miserly behavior. Now she was worried that he might scold her for gifting away her expensive gold ring. Under the pretext of getting it from the bed-room, Saraswati went to the kitchen. She decided to commit suicide by grinding the diamonds of her bracelet and eating them with water. So she ground diamonds in a pestle-mortar and mixed them with water in a glass. Just as she was about to drink the poison, she heard something fall from the ceiling into the glass. It was the nose-ring! She was overjoyed and bowed to the mūrti of Lord Vishnu for the miracle.

But when she took the nose-ring to Sreenivasa, it was his turn to get shocked. He thought that someone must have stolen it from the shop. He rushed to the shop and found that the nose-ring was missing from the safe. He returned home and asked Saraswati to tell the truth. She told him how she had gifted the ornament to a poor Brahmana who had been cheated with fake coins, and how she was about to commit suicide for the fear of her husband when a miracle saved her.

That night, Sreenivasa could not sleep. He concluded that it could have been only Lord Vishnu who had appeared as the Brahmana. The following morning, he said to his wife – “Saraswati, you have opened my eyes. I had been blinded by the love of wealth. This greed made me kill my own father. I also ill-treated Bhagavān Vishnu who came to my hut in the guise of a Brahmana. And then due to the same greed, I was going to lose you – my wonderful wife. What a sinner I am, whereas how blessed my wife is. She conducted herself so much more graciously and honorably than I!”

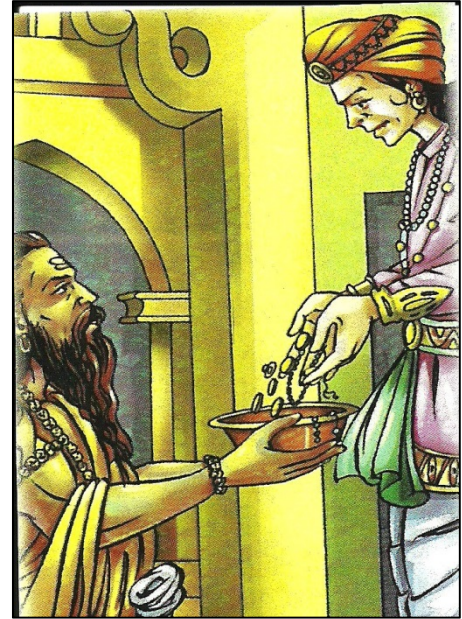
From that day, Sreenivasa, who was 30 years of age then, had a change of heart. He decided to donate all his wealth to the poor and the needy. His wife was overjoyed. Together, the couple and their children decided to roam from one pilgrim center to another inside the Vijayanagara Empire in South India, singing the praises of God. Ten years later, during his travel, Sreenivasa met Saint Vyasaṭīrtha, a scholar who followed the philosophy of Saint Madhvacharya (13th cent. CE). Vyasaṭīrtha initiated Sreenivasa to Sannyāsa, giving him the name ‘Purandara Dāsa’.

Purandara Dasa composed thousands of soul-stirring and melodious songs in praise of Lord Vishnu and his various forms. Almost 1000 of these survive today. He systematized the method of teaching Carnatic music which is followed to this day. One of his disciples, Swami Haridāsa, became a famous Hindustani classical musician, and was the guru of Tānsen, the legendary musician of north India. So, Purandara Dasa influenced the musical tradition of the entire Indian subcontinent. His very first musical composition starts with the words of lament for having wasted his earlier years in material indulgences.

Sreenivasa Naik realized that true happiness can never result from pursuing wealth as the ultimate goal in our life. Doing this makes us so greedy and heartless that we lose all love and respect for even our near and dear ones. True happiness results only when we pursue God as our final goal in our life. This realization made the heartless miser a saint, and gave him the eternal peace that he was searching for.

It is said that he and his wife became so indifferent towards wealth that one day the king of the Vijayanagara Empire decided to test them. One morning, as the couple went around begging for the food, the king disguised himself as a commoner and poured in their vessel a mixture of rice and diamonds. Purandara Dāsa did not realize it at that time and took the donation home. The king followed them and waited at their door, hiding himself, to see how the couple would react after seeing the diamonds.

A while later, as the wife took the donation to sift the rice from the diamonds, she complained to her husband, "People have become very unethical these days. Look, how many of these worthless stones they have mixed in our rice." Saying this, she gathered the stones and threw them outside her hut. The king was humbled when he saw that a couple devoted to Bhagavān really have very little use for worldly riches.



Although he was a saint, Purandaradasa would lose his patience and anger very quickly. He had a disciple named Appanna who lived with him. One night, when he was thirsty, he called out to Appanna to get him some water. But Appanna did not respond. Finally after he had been called many times, Appanna showed up with a glass of water. When Purandaradasa sipped the water, he was furious. First, Appanna took a long time to come, and then, he brought warm water for his Guru to drink in that really hot night! Out of anger, Purandaradasa hit the cheek of Appanna with that glass of water.



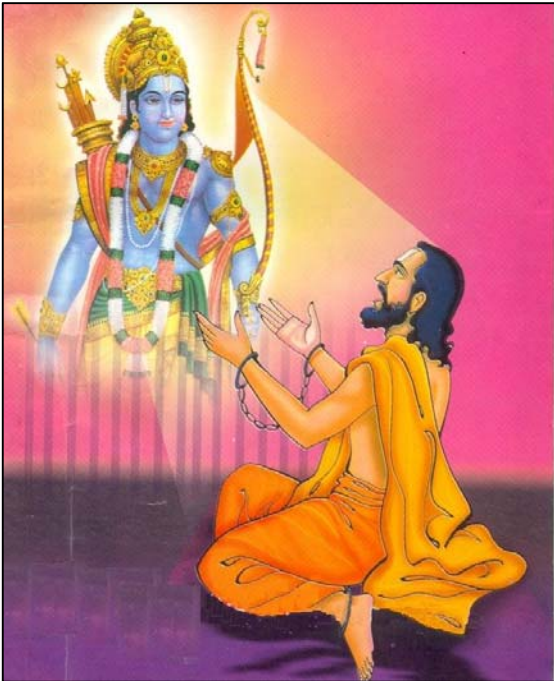
Poor Appanna wept, and went back to his room. After half an hour, Purandaradasa felt guilty for having hit Appanna, and went to his student's room to apologize. To his surprise, Appanna said, "Gurudev, I did not serve water to you, nor did you ever hit me. It must have been someone else who came to give you that glass of water."

Purandaradasa was surprised at this, and he went back to sleep. The next morning, he went to the local Krishna temple to worship, and a bigger surprise lay in store for him. The Murti of Krishna had a swollen cheek! Purandaradasa was terrified. It was none other than Krishna who had come to serve him water in the form of Appanna. Purandaradasa learned his lesson – Bhagavān Krishna took the blow from his devotee Purandaradasa to make him realize that we should not get angry, because in anger, we can do really bad things without realizing it. After that incident, Purandaradasa overcame anger. He was no longer short tempered. From now on, he was always patient with people, and did not get upset or angry

with them very easily.²⁰

9.7 Bhadrāchalam Rāmadāsa

In the 16th century CE, Abdul Hasan Tanishah, the ruler of the Golconda kingdom (containing parts of modern states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in India) imposed the Jaziya tax on Hindus to persuade them to convert to Islam. In the district of Bhadrachalam, his tax collector was ironically a Brahmana named Gopanna, who was a great devotee of Rama. Gopanna dutifully served his master, taxing his fellow Hindus. He became rich, but he spent most of his income in feeding poor devotees of Rama.



One night, Bhagavān Rama asked him to construct a new temple for Him in Bhadrachalam so that His devotees could worship Him fearlessly. Construction of a grand Hindu temple in a Muslim kingdom was unthinkable, but nevertheless, Gopanna started going around collecting funds for the Mandir. Everyone refused to give him any money with various excuses, till an old man told him, “Aren’t you ashamed to ask for money for a Rama Mandir? You are the one who has been serving as a lackey to Tanashah, who is fleecing us poor Hindus by forcing us to pay the Jaziya tax. And it is you who has been collecting the tax for him. You have betrayed your own people for your own fame, and now you dare to ask us for money for a Hindu Mandir?”

The retort for the old man really stung his heart, and Gopanna came up with an idea. He started stealing some money from his tax collections. In a few years, he had collected enough money with which he had a grand Rama Mandir constructed in Bhadrachalam.

When the word reached Tanishah, he was furious. He ordered Bhadrachalam to be imprisoned in the dungeons of the Golconda fort jail until he paid the money that he had stolen from the royal tax collection. For 12 long years, Gopanna languished in the jail, and the devotees of Rama named him ‘Bhadrachalam Ramadasa’, or the servant of Rama from Bhadrachalam.

Facing tortures



²⁰ Krishnamani, pp. 428-429

in the jail, Gopanna did not lose his faith in Rama. With his finger-nails, he painfully scratched a picture of Bhagavān Rama for his worship, and composed beautiful hymns to his Deity. One day, he suddenly heard Tanishah come into the prison and fall at his feet, saying, “Please forgive me Gopanna. I am releasing you immediately.”

Gopanna was shocked, and asked how the king’s heart had changed after these 12 long years? What Tanishah told him was even more shocking, “Yesterday night, two regal looking princes visited me in my room. They were luminous and their majesty was overwhelming. Indeed, they were Rama and Lakshmana, because they carried bows in their arms, and looked Divine. They paid me the money that you had taken from my tax collection, and asked me to release you. I was so over-powered by their beauty and power, that I have become their devotee. Now I truly believe that you did construct the Mandir for your God, and that he has Himself come to ask me to release you.”

When Gopanna heard these words, he immediately forgave Tanishah saying that he was blessed that Bhagavān Rama had himself appeared in front of him. In repentance, Tanishah now commanded that the kingdom of Golconda will offer pearls to the Mandir every year, and the gold coins left by the Princes with the King will be treated as sacred objects. The picture above shows the Mandir as it stands today.

And so, the tradition of gifting pearls and of worshipping the gold coins was started, and it still continues to this day, carried out by the State Govt. of Andhra Pradesh. The nail drawing of Gopanna can still be seen inside the jail of Golconda, and is worshipped by devotees even today. Clearly, Gopanna had realized that he had committed an evil action by colluding with Tanishah to fleece his fellow Hindus, but Rama had accepted his atonement and repentance!

9.8 Sant Tyāgarāja

Many Hindu Sants have said that there is nothing more precious than the name of Rama, just as Hanuman showed that even expensive pearls are worthless if Rama is not inside them. For a true Bhakta, there is no greater joy than singing the glories of Bhagavān. No treasure of this world can equal the worth of chanting Rama’s name.

A beautiful story is said from the life of Bhakta Tyāgarāja (1747 – 1847), who lived in Tamil Nadu. He composed beautiful religious poetry in the praise of his favorite deity, Rāma. Hearing about his musical genius, the local king of Thanjavur sent an invitation to him to become his royal musician of the court. He sent the invitation with numerous costly presents.

Had Tyagaraja accepted the invitation, he would have become very wealthy, but he would have had to sing the praises and glories of the King, instead of Rāma. Therefore Tyagaraja declined, with his reply in the form of a beautiful song that said that ‘Sannidhi’ (closeness to Rama) is worth much more and is more joyful than the royal ‘nidhi’ (treasure).

Tyāgarāja’s brother was very upset at his refusal of the job in the royal court. In anger, he threw the Mūrtis that Tyāgarāja had worshipped in a river. Tyāgarāja was very distressed to see the disappearance of his Mūrtis. He went on a religious pilgrimage all over South India, and composed numerous songs in praise of Rama.

By a miracle one day, Rama appeared to him in a dream and asked him to get the Mūrtis from the banks of that river. Tyagaraja discovered his original Mūrtis on the banks of a river, and brought them home. His brother and sister in law were shocked to see the miraculous re-appearance of the Mūrti and did not trouble the musical Bhakta anymore.

The saint lived a long life and composed thousands of Bhajans in praise of Rama. Many of these were recorded by the listeners along with the musical melodies with which he sang.

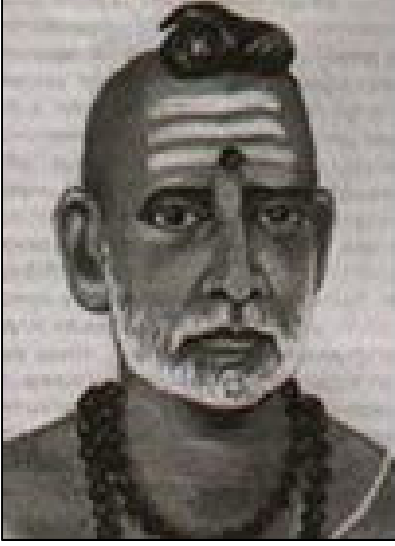


Even today, people sing them and remember Rama and his great Bhakta Tyāgarāja.

Class Discussion: The story of Bhakta Tyāgarāja shows that according to Hindu Dharma, music takes us closer to Bhagavān. But, do all types of music take us closer to Bhagavān? What types of music take us away from Him?

9.9 Poonthanam

Poonthanam: Poonthanam Namboodiri (1547 – 1640 CE), although born in a family of the learned Namboodiri Brahmanas of Kerala, was not very educated. He and his wife did not have any child for a long time. Therefore, they prayed to Bhagavān Krishna at the Guruvāyoorappan temple in northern Kerala and were blessed with a baby boy. Their joy knew no bounds, and the couple soon organized the annaprāshana (first feeding of solid food) ceremony for their son.



Unfortunately, a guest accidentally threw his shawl over the baby, who was sleeping in the corner of a room on the floor. Other guests too blindly did the same. Tragically, the baby got suffocated to death. Poonthanam and his wife were greatly grieved, and Poonthanam sought solace by worshipping Krishna in the Guruvāyaraapan Mandir, imagining Krishna Himself as his own baby. In a mood of great sorrow, he composed a beautiful poem called the Jnanappana, in which he expresses his great Bhakti for Krishna. A line in the poem reads, “When the baby Krishna plays in one’s mind, does one need any biological children?” This poem is in the Malayalam language which is spoken in Kerala.

Residing in the same Mandir was Melpathur Narayana Bhattatiri, a renowned scholar of Sanskrit who composed the immortal Sanskrit classic called Narayaneeyam in praise of Bhagavān Vishnu. Poonthanam humbly approached Bhattatiri with the request, “Sir, you are a great scholar. Please go through my poem and let me know if I should correct any mistakes in it.” But Bhattatiri responded arrogantly, “Why should I review a poem in the Malayalam language which is spoken by the common people? Plus, your poem will have many mistakes anyway, because you are not very educated.”

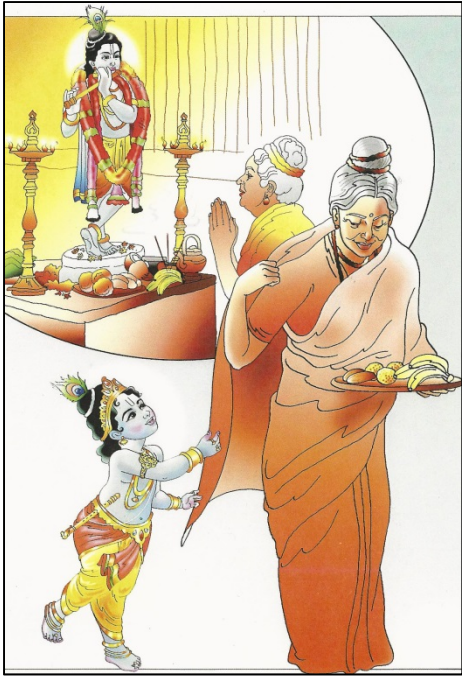
When Poonthanam heard this answer, he was greatly saddened. He burst into tears. Bhagavān Krishna could not bear the fact that Bhattatiri, although a great scholar, had insulted His humble bhakti Poonthanam. And miraculously, a voice from the mūrti said, “Poonthanam is perhaps not as strong as you in vibhakti (grammatical declensions in Sanskrit), but he is greatly superior to you in Bhakti. I prefer his Malayalam poem Jnanappana over your Sanskrit work Narayaneeyam.”

The command of Krishna greatly shook Bhattatiri. He rushed to Poonthanam and begged for forgiveness. When Bhattatiri read the Jnanappana, he was really moved and impressed by how deep and profound the sentiments of the poem were. In fact, Bhattatiri then incorporated some ideas from the Malayalam poem in his own Sanskrit work! Today, the Jnanappana, due to its great esteem and popularity in Kerala, is considered as the Bhagavadgita of Kerala. This poem is renowned for the fact that it explains the deep philosophy of Hindu Dharma in a very easy to understand manner in a language that is spoken by the common man.

The incident of Krishna preferring Jnanappana over Narayaneeyam also demonstrates the fact that Bhagavān does not care the language used by his Bhakta, as long as that language is full of love and devotion for Him.

9.10 Kurur Ammā & Bilvamangala

In the 16th-17th century in the town of Guruvayoor in Kerala (India) lived two devotees of Krishna – an elderly lady named Kurur Amma, and a poet named Vilvamangal. The people of the town believed that Krishna often appeared in front of these two Bhaktas in the form of a child to play with them.



One day, a friend of the two devotees came to visit Vilvamangal and requested, “Dear friend, I have a terrible stomach ache that refuses to go. Can you inform your friend Krishna about it?” Vilvamangal agreed.

The next day, when Krishna appeared before Vilvamangal, he said, “Krishna, my friend asked me to inform you that he is suffering from a bad stomach ache.” Krishna replied, “Well, this is because of some bad Karma that he did in a previous life. He must reap the fruit of that now.”

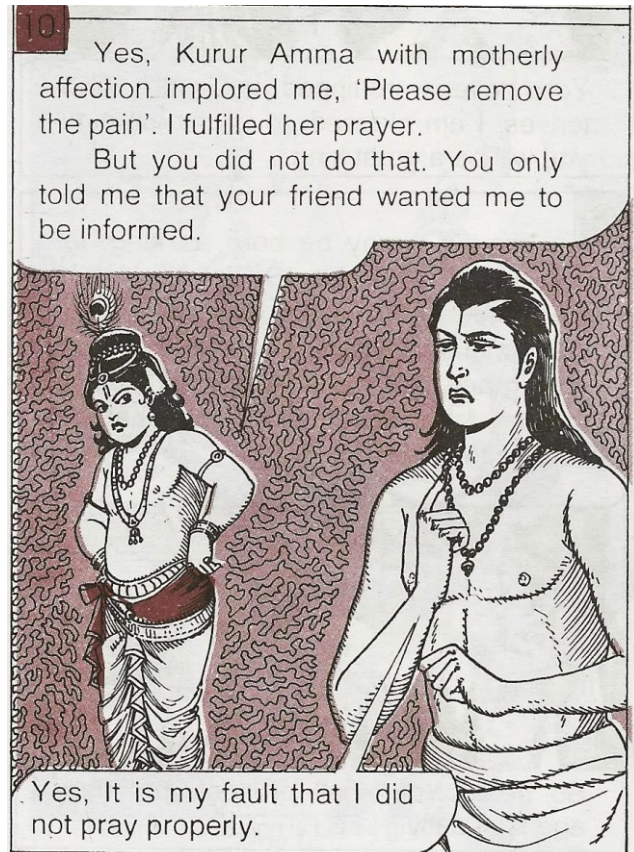
Vilvamangal conveyed Krishna’s message to his suffering friend the following day. Disappointed, the man now went to Kurur Amma and begged her to ask Krishna to remove his stomach ache.

When Krishna came to play with Kurur Amma, she pleaded with him lovingly, “Dear Krishna, a friend came to me with a very bad stomach

ache. He is really suffering a lot. You are very kind and merciful. Please do this favor on me and remove his pain.” Krishna replied, “As you wish. His pain will go away.”

The gentleman’s stomach ache indeed disappeared. When he met Vilvamangal a few days later, he told the poet how his stomach ache went away after Kurur Amma had requested Krishna. This made Vilvamangal very angry. When Krishna came to visit him the next time, Vilvamangal complained, “You are being partial. When I told you about my friend’s stomach ache, you said that he was suffering due to his bad Karma. But when Kurur Amma spoke to you, you responded to her request favorably and my friend got healed.”

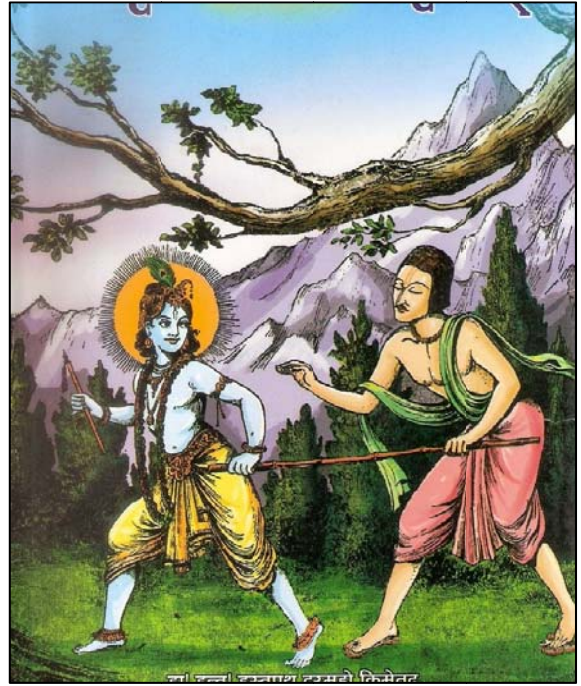
Krishna replied, “Instead of being happy that your friend’s pain is gone, you are upset that I answered Kurur Amma’s loving request and that your friend was healed because of her and not you. I am not partial to anyone. I respond to the prayers of my Bhaktas after determining whether they have said it with feeling and love or not. You just conveyed your friend’s request to me as if you were doing a favor on him. But Kurur Amma requested me with love and sincerity, and therefore I fulfilled her wish.”



Bilvamangala, a devotee of Shri Krishna, once visited the temples of Rama in Ayodhya. A Sadhu asked him, “Why have you forsaken your Krishna to worship King Rama here?”

Bilvamangal replied, “I see my Krishna alone in Rama. But if you wish that I should worship only Krishna, then I will pray to Rama to transform Himself into Krishna. May Rama leave aside his bow and arrow for a moment and pick a flute. May he take off his royal crown and wear a tiara of peacock feathers for my sake for some time.”

A miracle happened, and the murti of Rama transformed to that of Krishna for some time in the full vision of everyone.²¹



9.11 King Kulashekhara Alvār:



It is said that Kulashekhara Alwar, the saintly king of Kerala in the 8th-9th cent., was one day listening to this section of the Ramayana in which Bhagavān Rama was gathering the army of ill-equipped and poor Vānaras to fight the powerful and rich king of Sri Lanka. For the King, the Ramayana was not an ancient historical story, but something that was happening in front of his own eyes because he listened to the Ramayana with his full heart in it.

He got so excited that he ordered, “What a shame that my Lord Rama should have to rely on the Vānaras who are short of armor and weapons, and here I am ruling a kingdom. I order my army to get ready and march towards Lanka to support Lord Rama and rescue Sita.” The ministers got scared when they heard the command of their King, and it was with great intelligence and tact that they were able to convince him to withdraw his command. They pretended that Rama had sent a message himself to the King that he no longer needed Kulashekhara’s help because Ravana had been defeated.

King Kulashekhara is regarded as one of the 12 greatest Vaishnava saints of southern India. He himself wrote many sacred hymns in Sanskrit as well as in a language named Maṇipravālā (a mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit) that are still sung by Hindus with great devotion.

²¹ Swami Akhandananda Saraswati (1966), p. 320-321

10. The Āchāryas: The Scholar Saints of Hindu Dharma

We Hindus have been blessed to have had several saints who were great scholars of Dharma. These saints are respectfully referred to as Āchāryas, or 'Teachers'. Many of these Āchāryas wrote books explaining Hindu scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. They also wrote beautiful stotras (devotional hymns) praising Bhagavān and His or Her different Forms. Hindus chant these stotras even to this day. In this chapter, we will study about the four most influential of these Āchāryas namely Ādi Shankaracharya, Shri Ramanujacharya, Shri Madhvāchārya & Shri Vallabhāchārya.

10.1 Shri Ādi Shankarāchārya (around 700 CE)

Shri Ādi Shankarāchārya is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers and saints in Hindu Dharma. He wrote hundreds of books on our Dharma in a short life span of 32 years, and toured the entire Indian subcontinent on foot two times. He established four monasteries in the four corners of India. Even after almost 1400 years, these monasteries continue to spread his message.



Around 650 CE, a poor Brahmana couple named Shivaguru and Āryāmbā worshipped Shiva for forty-eight (48) days because they were childless. Shiva appeared to Shivaguru in a dream and asked, "Do you want a foolish child who will live a long life, or a wise son who will live only sixteen years?" Shivaguru said that he would rather have the short-lived but wise son.

Soon thereafter, a son was born to the couple. They named him Shankara, because he was obtained with the blessings of Shiva, whose other name is Shankara. Unfortunately, Shivaguru died soon, leaving the baby boy orphaned with his widowed mother.

Shankarāchārya serves his mother with great devotion: Little Shankara was very devoted to his mother. One day, his mother fell sick and she was not able to walk to the river to take her daily bath. The little boy Shankarāchārya collected his team of friends and together, they dug from the river a channel which flowed just outside of their home. Now, Āryāmbā could conveniently go to that channel for her daily bath. The home in which Shankarāchārya was born, as well as the river channel that he had dug exists even to this day.

Shankara showers gold fruit in the home of a poor and generous woman:

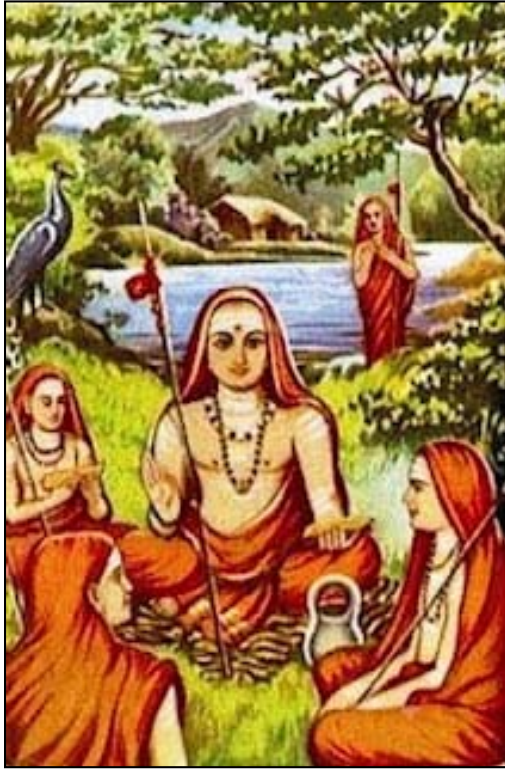


As a student, Shankaracharya would go to a new home every morning to beg for food. One day, he reached the home of a very poor widow. She had no food to give to Shankaracharya. But in her courtyard, there was a tree of gooseberry (amla fruit). With tears in her eyes, she plucked a few fruit and gave it the student saying, "My dear son, I am a very poor woman and do not have decent food to give to you. Therefore, I am giving you these amla fruit from my tree. Please accept them and forgive me for not being able to give you anything better to eat."

Shankaracharya was moved by the sincerity of the woman. Instantly, he composed a beautiful stotra called the 'Kanakadhārā stotram' in praise of Devi Lakshmi, and requested the Devi to shower the woman's home with gold. Devi Lakshmi appeared and said, "This lady has not done any good karma in her previous lives. Therefore, she does not deserve to be rich." But the boy Shankaracharya pleaded, "Devi, by giving

me food despite being poor, has she not done a great deed in this life? Please reward her for that.”

Devi Lakshmi smiled at Shankaracharya’s intelligence and showered gold pieces shaped like the gooseberry in the woman’s courtyard. Even today, the descendants of the poor lady in Kerala live in the same location. They are rich and trade in gold, thanks to the mercy of Shankaracharya on their great ancestor. This incident from the life of Shankaracharya shows that giving food to a hungry person is a very good karma and brings great rewards. For this reason, donation of food is termed in Sanskrit language as ‘sadāvrata’, meaning ‘a good vow that should be practiced every day.’ We should try to feed someone in need every day of our life.



Story: The Favorite Student of Shankaracharya

When Shankaracharya became a great scholar and teacher he attracted numerous intelligent disciples for studying under him. But one of his disciples named Totaka (also called Anandagiri) was a particularly dull-witted student. He never spoke a word in the class, and always appeared to be someone who never understood anything. And yet, Shankaracharya would never start teaching his class before Totaka was seated in the classroom. Totaka himself never seemed to be interested in knowledge, and spent his time doing menial tasks like washing clothes, cooking or fetching water. One day, Totaka did not arrive on time, and the other students prodded their Guru, “Sir, why don’t you start teaching? That Totaka does not understand anything anyway. So why should we all wait for him.” But the Guru asked them to wait. When Totaka arrived, Shankaracharya said to him, “You are late. So as a punishment, let us hear a summary of all that I have taught from you in a few words.”

Totaka bowed to his teacher humbly, and spontaneously composed a hymn called ‘Totakashtakam’. The hymn, in a mere 8 very beautiful verses, explained the entire philosophical teachings of Shankaracharya. When the other students heard the dull-witted Totaka recite such a profound hymn, they were humbled. They had thought Totaka to be a fool, but now they understood why their Guru

had a soft corner for him. Totaka eventually became one of the four major disciples of Shankaracharya.

This incident is a lesson for all students to respect their classmates and peers because everyone has some special quality even though he or she may appear to be very uncool and simple. We must never tease or bully others.

Shankaracharya and the Chandāla:

Adi Shankaracharya (7th-8th century AD) is considered one of the greatest Saints of Hindu Dharma. He taught us that the same Bhagavān is the basis of the entire creation. But sometimes, even Saints forget to practice the message that they teach to others.

One day, he was travelling on the outskirts of Varanasi (a city holy to Bhagavān Shiva) with his disciples, when a fierce looking Chandāla (an uncivilized and unclean person, considered to be an ‘untouchable’ in ancient India) accompanied by four dogs blocked his way. Shankaracharya looked at the Chandāla in disgust, and asked him to get out of his way.

The Chandāla replied, “Should I remove



my unclean body, or should I remove out of your way the Bhagavān, Who lives within my heart too?”

Shankaracharya was taken aback by the reply, and he looked at the Chandāla in amazement. When he did so, Shankaracharya had a vision of none other than Shiva in that Chandāla. He saw that the four dogs were none other than the four holy Vedas (the four holy books of the Hindus).

Indeed, Bhagavān Shiva had appeared Himself to teach Shankaracharya a lesson – that no matter how humble the other person is, we should treat him with respect because Bhagavān exists within him too. Shankaracharya bowed to the Chandāla, and asked for forgiveness.

10.2 Shri Rāmānujāchārya (1017 – 1137 CE)

Story: Ramanujacharya risks going to Hell for the sake of others

Shri Ramanujacharya was a great Hindu Saint who lived in South India from 1017 – 1137 C.E. Once, he learned that a teacher named Goshtipūrṇa knew a powerful secret mantra with which one can really please Lord Vishnu and ask for several boons in return.

Shri Ramanujacharya approached the teacher, and requested to be taught the mantra. The teacher agreed, but on one condition – that he must keep the mantra secret and should not teach it to anyone else. Shri Ramanujacharya agreed to this condition.

Guru Goshtipurna then taught him the sacred Vaishnava mantra “Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya”. However, thinking that such a liberation granting mantra must not be hidden from the masses, Ramanuja climbed the top of the temple at Thirukottiyur temple in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and started preaching it to all.

Guru Goshtipurna was very angry at this act of disobedience and scolded Ramanuja saying that he will surely go to Hell for disobeying his Guru. Ramanuja replied that if his going to Hell could give liberation to many others, he would not mind sacrificing residing in Hell.

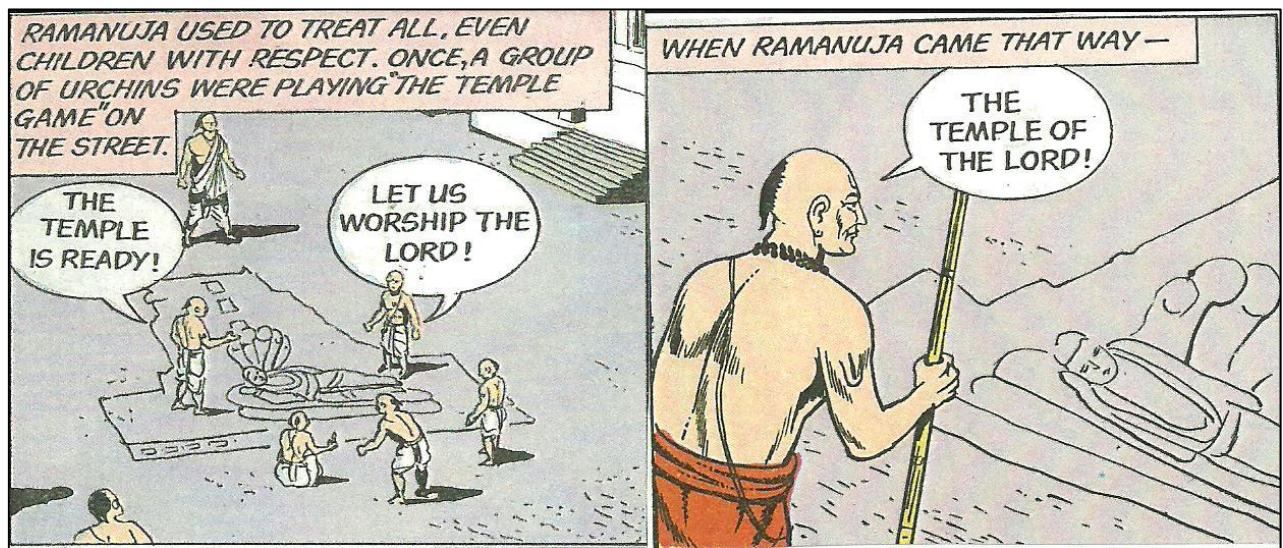
The words of Ramanuja moved his Guru and he was moved to tears. The Guru embraced his student and said that he alone has understood the true meaning of the mantra.



In the spiritual tradition of Sri Ramanuja, another great Saint named Pillai Lokūchārya (1205- 1311) was born a century later. So pleased was Bhagavān Vishnu with him that He blessed the saint saying that whosoever associates with Lokacharya will also come to Vishnu with him. So compassionate was Pillai Lokacharya that thereafter, he would touch even ants lovingly and would stare at plants for a long time so that even the souls of these living things would go to Bhagavān Vishnu.

Story: Rāmānujāchārya teaches the importance of Faith to his Students

Some street urchins were playing a game on a sandy stretch of a sidewalk. They fashioned a Mandir on the sand, and crafted a Murti of Bhagavān Vishnu inside it. Then, the kids conducted a Pūjā with great faith and love. After the Pūjā was over, the kids picked small amounts of sand and offered it as ‘Prasād’ to passers-by. But most passers-by merely laughed at the kids’ game, and threw the sand offered to them mockingly.

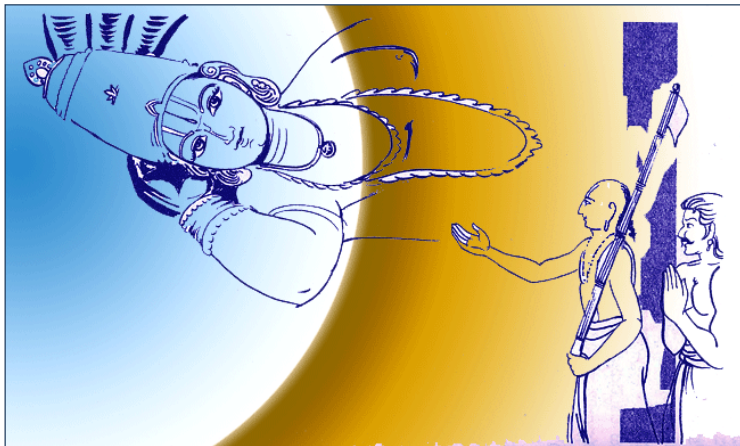


However, when Shri Ramanuja walked by and saw the kids' Mandir and their devotion, he prostrated down on the street and bowed to the sand Murti and the Mandir. His disciples were amused and asked him, "They were just playing a game. Why did you take the trouble to prostrate to their sculpture?"

Ramanuja said, "Bhagavān dwells wherever there is innocence, faith and devotion. Did you not see these qualities in the eyes of the kids? They genuinely believed and saw Bhagavān in their own sand Murti. And therefore, Vishnu indeed exists in the Murti and I bowed to Him."

Story: Dhanurdasa finds the Most Beautiful Eyes:

Shri Ramanujacharya once saw a strange incident – A man was walking backwards, while holding an umbrella over his girlfriend. The saint asked the man the reason for his inappropriate behavior. The man replied, "I worship beauty. Even while walking with this woman, I do not want to waste a single moment by not seeing the beauty of her lovely eyes."



Ramanuja thought, "I wish that his infatuation for beauty were directed towards Vishnu, the most beautiful one! If that happens, this man would attain great spiritual heights." Therefore, the Saint said, "If you really worship beauty, then come today evening to the Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam at the time of the āratī (prayer ceremony done with lamps)."

The man was reluctant to go to the temple but his lady-love said, "Perhaps a misfortune would befall you if you do not obey the command of a holy man. So just go for today." The man showed up at the required time in the temple, and he was overwhelmed when he saw the beauty of the lamps being waved around the Deity. He was moved by the beauty of the prayers being chanted by the devotees, and by the faith in their eyes.

His transformation occurred there and then. He gave up his wrong ways and became a true devotee of Vishnu. His name is recorded as Dhanurdasa in the Hindu tradition. Dhanurdasa married his girlfriend with the blessings of Ramanujacharya and they both settled down in the temple city of Srirangam, where the couple spent their lives in the worship of Bhagavān.

Indeed, the realization that Bhagavān is the most beautiful one had made Dhanurdasa lose all arrogance and other negative traits of his character, as well as his love for worldly beauty, that was no match for the beauty of Bhagavān.

When Shri Ramanuja became old, he needed support to walk. Every morning, he would take a bath in the river Kaveri and then return to the temple, leaning in the shoulders of Dhanurdasa. This annoyed some of his followers who said, “Dhanurdasa was a foolish person in the past. Moreover, he is not born in a great family of Brahmanas. Why don’t you lean on the shoulder of one of the more prominent of your disciples?”

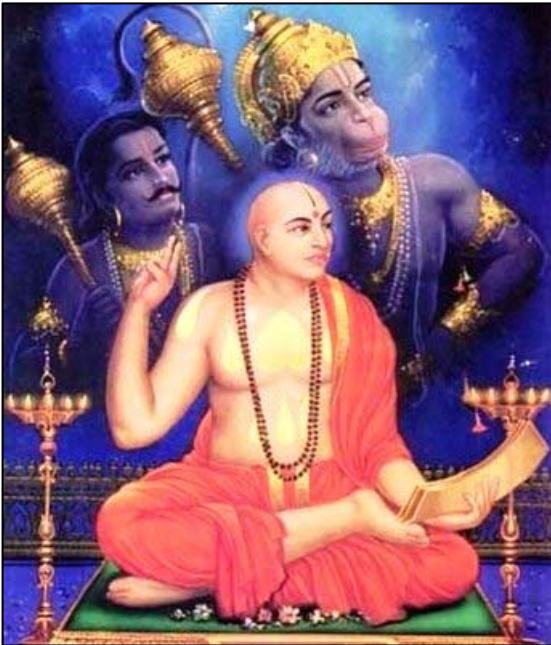


Ramanuja replied, “Knowledge, birth in a great family and wealth can make one arrogant. Dhanurdasa does not have any of these three types of arrogance. The Kaveri River’s water can only clean my external body. But the man’s heart and mind can only be cleaned by the touch of a person like Dhanurdasa, who has no arrogance of wealth, knowledge or birth in an elitist family.”

10.3 Madhvāchārya (1238 – 1317 CE)

Madhva was a very religious child. One day, at the age of three, he disappeared from his house. After a long search, the little boy was located inside a temple several miles away. Madhva told his parents that Bhagavān Vishnu himself had taken him to the temple by holding his hand! Another time, a moneylender came to collect his debt from

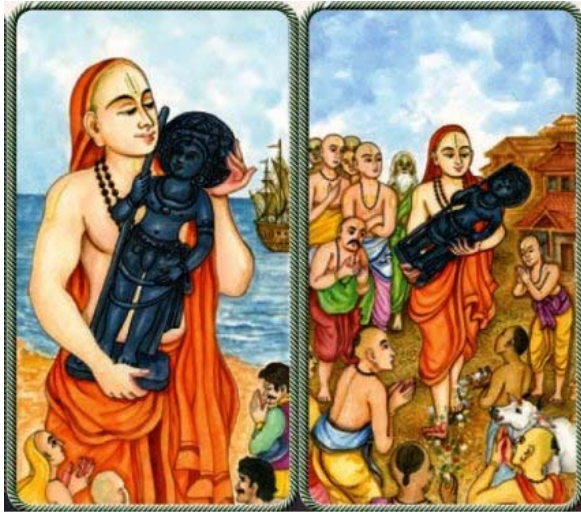
Madhva’s father, who was too poor to repay the money. Madhva went to the garden and collected a few tamarind seeds and gave them to the money lender. Miraculously, the seeds turned into gold, and the debt was repaid in full.



Madhvāchārya was not just a very intelligent student, he was also a very good sportsman. His teachers were concerned that Madhva spent all his time in swimming and wrestling, sports in which he defeated all his friends. But whenever they would question him, not only he answered correctly all the questions related to the last lesson in class, but would also know what the teachers were planning to teach next!

At a very young age, Madhvāchārya became a sannyāsi – a wandering Hindu ascetic. Once, during his travels in North India, he was stopped threateningly by soldiers of the Muslim Sultan. Madhvāchārya started talking to them in fluent Turkish, the mother tongue of the Sultan, who was so impressed that he let the Āchārya be freed.

One day, Madhvāchārya was meditating on the seashore when he saw a ship being tossed violently in the waves. Madhvāchārya waved his upper garment, and the winds calmed down miraculously. When the ship reached



the shore, the owner gave the Saint a mound of gopichandan (a special type of yellow clay) as a gift to thank him. Madhvāchārya took the mound of clay and washed it in a pond, and a beautiful Mūrti of Krishna emerged from it. Unfortunately, the mūrti turned out to be very heavy and even thirty people were not able to carry it. But, Madhvāchārya stepped forward and carried it alone to a site in Udupi. A Krishna Mandir was constructed to worship the Mūrti, and Madhvāchārya told everyone that the Mūrti was divine as it had been sculpted by none other than Vishvakarma. Gradually, his eight prominent disciples founded eight mathams (monasteries) in Udupi, and took turns to lead the worship in the Krishna Mandir according to the rules written by Madhvāchārya himself.

Madhvāchārya wrote 37 books to explain his teachings. A copy of these books written by one of his own student still exists, even after almost 700 years! 1238 – 1317 CE is regarded as an Avatāra of Vāyu Devatā, just like Bhīma and Hanumān, which explains his great physical strength. Even today, many Hindus continue to worship at the Krishna Mandir of Udupi, and the heads of the eight mathams continue to spread the message of their founding Āchārya.

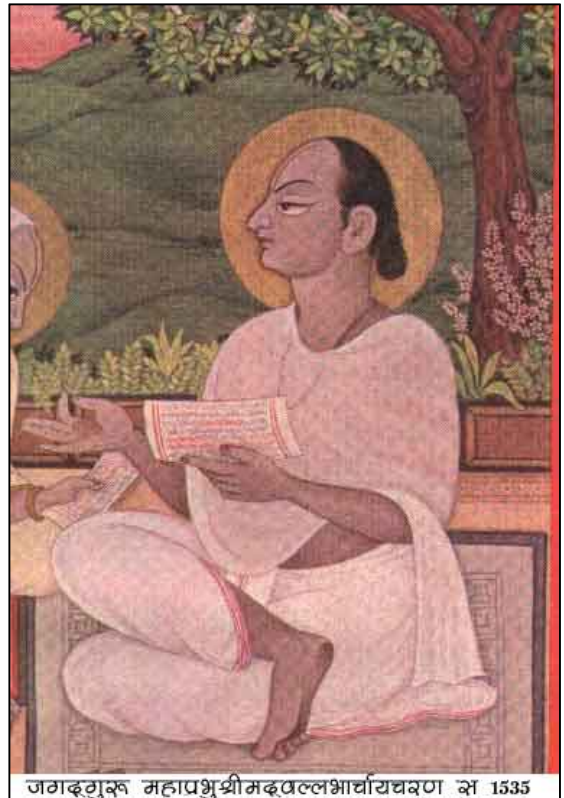
Class Discussion: Do you remember the story of Kanakadāsa who worshipped at the Udupi Krishna Mandir?

10.4 Vallabhāchārya (1479 – 1531 CE)

Shri Mahāprabhu Vallabhāchārya (1479-1531 CE) was a great devotee of Krishna. He was born to a saintly couple from the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. They had gone to the holy Hindu city of Allahabad for a pilgrimage, when his mother was pregnant with him. Suddenly, the news arrived that an army of Muslims will invade the city, kill Hindus and demolish the Mandirs. In fear, Vallabhāchārya's parents fled towards Central India. Due to the hardship of the journey, Vallabhāchārya's mother delivered him. But alas! The baby was born dead, and had no sign of life. In great grief, the couple wrapped the baby boy lovingly in piece of cloth and placed him at the base of a tree. Then, they took shelter nearby to spend the night.

During the night, Krishna appeared in their dreams and said, "Do not despair. I have brought your baby back to life. He is meant to be a great scholar of Dharma, and will spread devotion to Me when he grows up." The couple was overjoyed when they woke up, because they both had the same dream. They rushed to the tree and found that the baby was in fact alive. They unwrapped him lovingly and brought him home to raise him as a gift of Krishna.

Vallabha indeed grew up to be a great scholar of Hindu Dharma and a great Saint who attracted numerous disciples, including the blind Saint Surdas. He frequently travelled to holy places associated with Krishna, such as Mathura and Vrindāvana, where Krishna had spent his childhood. He also inspired others to construct temples to Krishna in the region, which had been devastated and plundered during the several centuries



जगद्गुरु महाप्रभु श्रीमदवल्लभाचार्यचरण १५३५

of Muslim rule earlier.

Story: Everything belongs to Krishna

One day, while in Vrindavan, he learned that the Krishna temple did not have enough money for food to offer to the Deity. The Vallabhāchārya ordered that the gold saucer of the temple be pawned to get the required amount. But when food was purchased with the money and offered to Krishna's mūrti, Vallabhāchārya refused to accept even one morsel of the prasāda.

Till a devotee did not donate enough money and the temple did not restore the pawned gold saucer, Vallabhāchārya did not eat anything.

Finally, when he ate food for the first time in two days, he called his devotees and explained to them the cause of his fasting with tears in his eyes, "The gold saucer belonged only to Bhagavān. We had no right to pawn an item that already belonged to Him, and then consume the food purchased with that money. For this reason, I felt guilty and did not eat any of the food offered to Krishna as prasāda, because that would mean stealing from Him. Now that the saucer is restored to Krishna, I can eat the prasāda."

Story: All the Mūrtis of Bhagavān are sacred and holy

The Mūrtis of Bhagavān Vishnu are of two types. One is the round Shāligrāma stone. The Shāligrāma is a natural black stone found in the bed of the Gandaki river that flows through Nepal, and in Bihar in India. It often has the shape of the Sudarshana Chakra, and the conch shell carried by Bhagavān Vishnu. Due to this, the Shāligrāma is worshipped by Hindus as a manifestation or Mūrti of Bhagavān Vishnu. The other is the regular four armed human form Mūrti of Vishnu.



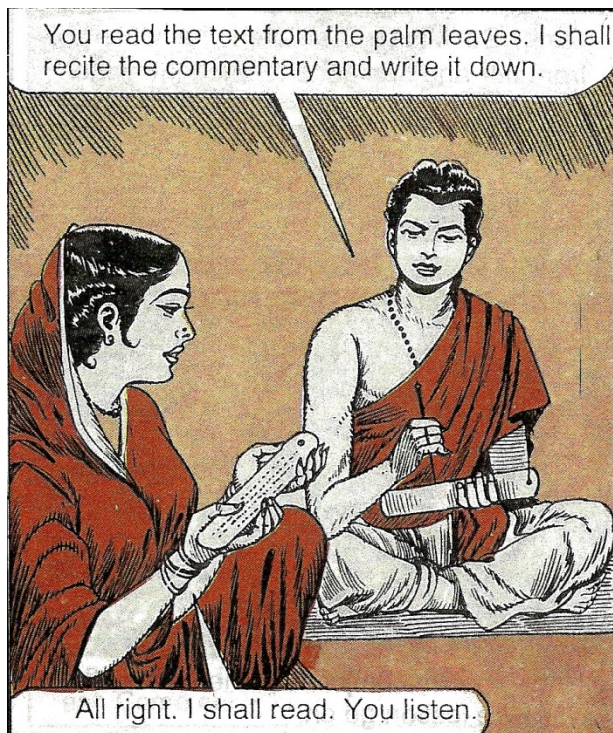
One day, a gentleman who had one of each type of Mūrti came to visit Vallabhāchārya and argued that the Shāligrāma is a better Mūrti to worship Vishnu than the four armed statue. Vallabhāchārya tried to explain to him that both types of Mūrti are of the same Bhagavān Vishnu. Therefore, how could one be superior to the other? But the gentleman would not listen.

Before sleeping that night, he placed his Shāligrāma on the chest of the other Vishnu Mūrti that he had. When he woke next morning, he was stunned to find that the Shāligrāma had broken down into a powder. Scared, he tied the powder in a piece of cloth and brought it to Vallabhāchārya. The saint said, "Mix some water with the powder and make it into a paste." When the gentleman did so, he was surprised to see that the paste miraculously changed into a stone just as before! He asked Vallabhāchārya for forgiveness and said, "I have understood that all the Mūrtis are of one and the same Bhagavān. Therefore, we should not regard one as superior to the other."

Further Research:

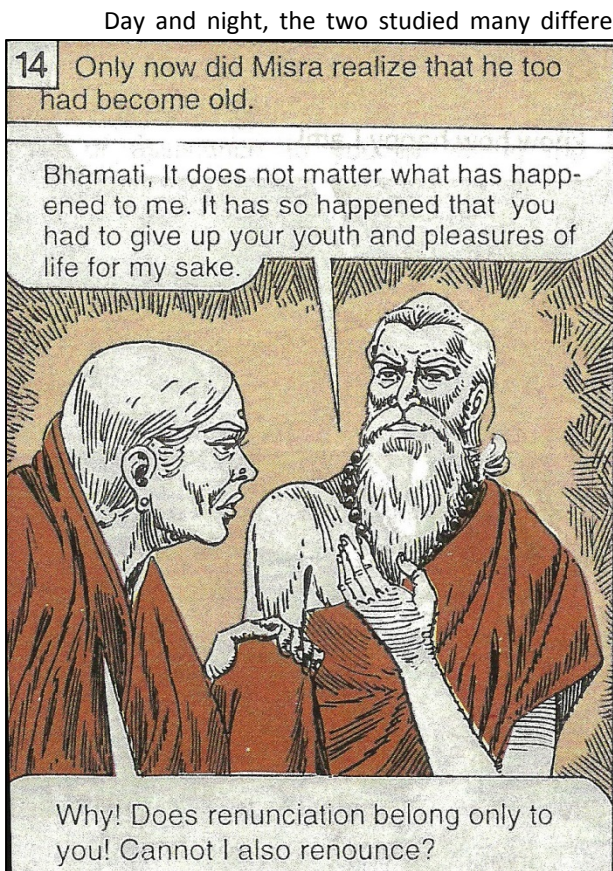
In this chapter, we read about some incidents from the lives of the Āchāryas – the scholar saings of Hindu Dharma. In addition to these four Āchāryas, we have several others, like Nimbārkāchārya, Shrikanthāchārya and Baladeva Āchārya. Research the lives of these other Āchāryas.

10.5 Vāchaspati Mishra – the Scholar of all Hindu Philosophies, and his wife Bhāmati



In ancient India, it was a Hindu tradition to give a gift (called 'Guru Dakshinā') to the teacher once the student had completed his education. In the 8th century, in the Indian state of Bihar, Vachaspati Mishra was one of the most brilliant students of his Guru. When his education was coming to an end, the Guru called for Vachaspati and requested, "I have only one daughter Bhāmatī. She is also a very learned woman. I would like you to be her husband. This is my command." Vachaspati replied, "That would be my honor. But I also want to give you a Guru Dakshinā per our tradition.

The Guru replied, "Very well then. I want you to write a detailed explanation of the Brahmasutras. My daughter is very learned and she will help you too." Vachaspati and Bhāmatī got married, but he said to her, "Till I do not complete this explanation of the Brahmasutras, we should not live like husband and wife. I must pay my Guru Dakshina first before I can accept you fully as my wife." Bhāmatī agreed.



Day and night, the two studied many different scriptures and he wrote beautiful explanations on all the schools of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. Finally, after mastering all these schools of philosophy, they couple started working on the explanation of the Brahmasutras, using as their basis the earlier work on the Brahmasutras by Shankaracharya. Many years passed, and Bhāmatī lovingly served her husband, and fulfilled all his needs even while helping with his scholarly work.

One late night, when the book was completed, Vachaspati fell asleep at his desk. When he woke up, he noticed that Bhāmatī had placed her own blanket on him, because it was a cold night. He looked at her carefully for the first time and saw that with time, she had become old and so had he. Their hair had turned white. Now, they were too old to have any children.

And yet, all these years, even though he never paid any attention to her services and to her sacrifice, she had never complained. She had smilingly chosen to help her husband in his work, even though that meant living several decades of your youth as a childless married lady. Vachaspati was very moved by her devotion to him and in his honor, he named his last work and greatest work on the

Brahmasutras as 'Bhāmatī'. This beautiful work perpetuated the memory of her dedication, love and sacrifice for Vachaspati Mishra, and is even today considered one of the greatest classics of Hindu philosophy.

10.6 Vedanta Deshika, the Forgiving follower of Ramanuja

Shri Vedanta Deshika (14th cent. CE) was a very saintly person as well as a great scholar of Hindu Dharma.



Some scholars, who were jealous of his fame, decided to play a trick on him to mock him. They hung a garland of their shoes on the outside door frame of his house. The garland was so large that it was impossible to pass through the door without hitting one's head on the garland.

The next morning, the scholars hid themselves close to the house to watch the spectacle as Deshika left his home for his daily bath. When Deshika opened the door, and stepped out, his head hit the shoes.

The jealous scholars came out of hiding and started ridiculing Vedanta Deshika for placing their shoes on his head. But Vedanta Deshika calmly composed a Sanskrit verse saying- "To reach Bhagavan, some do good deeds whereas others follow the path of spiritual wisdom. But I worship the shoes of devotees of Vishnu."

When the jeering scholars heard this, they felt ashamed. They came forward and asked Vedanta Deshika for forgiveness for their petty behavior. As usual, Deshika forgave them.²²

10.7 Sadāshiva Brahmendra Saraswatī

He was a great Yogi and Vedantin who lived in the 18th cent. in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. During some times of the year, the Kaveri river dries up. Swami Brahmendra choose a mound of sand on the dried river course and went into meditation. Unfortunately soon thereafter, the river was flooded. When they receded, the Swami was nowhere to be seen. It was assumed that he had been washed away and had drowned.



A few days later, a farmer came to the river bank to take some sand for constructing his home. Suddenly, his shovel hit something hard, and emerged from the sand mound with blood on its tip. The farmer started digging the sand hill with his hands gently. He found a Sage in the state of deep meditation.

Swami Brahmendra came out of the meditation and just walked away.

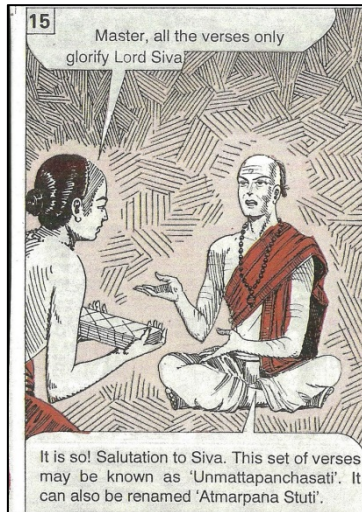
²² Chaitanya and Chakra, p. 47-

Once, he was resting next to a heap of grain freshly harvested by another farmer and went into meditation. The farmer thought that the Swami had arrived to steal grain. He took a stick in his hands and rushed to hit the Swami with it. But half-way through, his hand and the entire body froze in that very posture! The next morning, when the Swami came out of his meditation, he opened his eyes and smiled at the farmer. The farmer came out of the frozen stupor and could now move his limbs normally. The Swami blessed him and walked away.

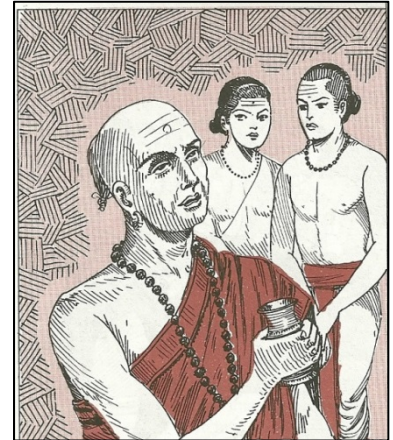
At another time, the Swami, who hardly ever wore clothes, walked past the harem of a regional Muslim Nawab. The Swami was a completely spiritual man, but the Nawab accused him of outraging the modesty of his wives. He rushed forward and cut off both the hands of Sadashiva Brahmendra with his sword. But astonishingly, the Swami continued to walk as if nothing had happened. The Nawab was terrified, and picked up the severed arms and rushed towards the Swami in deep remorse. The arms connected back to his body miraculously as if nothing had happened.

10.8 Appayya Dikshita (1520 – 1593 CE)

Appayya Dikshita (1520-1593 CE) was a great Bhakta of Bhagavān Shiva. One day, he called his disciples and said, “I want to test myself and determine if my Bhakti to Bhagavān Shiva is genuine or not. Therefore, I will consume the juice of Dhaturā, which will make me intoxicated. I want you to write down whatever I say in that state.”



When Appayya Dikshita got intoxicated, then instead of saying nonsense as everyone else does, he started chanting beautiful verses in worship of Shiva, and the thoughts of a true Bhakta. His disciples then gave him a medicine to bring him out of intoxication. Appayya Dikshita saw for himself that the 50 verses that he had recited were beautiful poetry that reflected his dedication to Shiva. He named the entire hymn of these 50 verses as Unmatta-panchashati and also as Ātmārpana-Stuti.



This incident demonstrated that Appayya's mind was completely saturated with nothing but devotion to Shiva. This is why in whichever mental state he was, he thought of nothing but Shiva, and his Bhakti was genuine.

11. Nirguṇī Sants: Worshippers of Formless Bhagavān in North and West India

11.0 Who were the Nirguṇī Sants?

Most of the Saints of Hindu Dharma worshipped Bhagavān with the help of Mūrtīs or through meditation in Mandirs and other holy places. But, there was another group of Hindu Saints especially in Northern and Western India who did not always use Mūrtīs for worship. They often taught that Bhagavān is a great ātmā and it is best to worship him without using mūrtīs. They argued that as Bhagavān is present everywhere and therefore there is no need to go to Mandirs or to holy places to worship Him. Instead, he should be searched for in one's own heart. These saints are sometimes called 'Nirguṇī Sants.' Many of them were disciples of Rāmānanda (himself a student of Rāmānujāchārya about whom we studied in the previous chapter), or of Dādū. Others were students of Guru Nānak and other Sikh Gurus. Let us read about some of these Sants in this chapter.

Both the options of worshipping Bhagavān (with a form as in a Mūrti or as formless) are allowed in Hindu scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita. Therefore, we can choose one of these two paths depending on what we prefer. Which method do you prefer to worship Bhagavān and why?

11.1 Sant Rāmānanda

Swami Rāmānanda lived in the 14th-15th century CE. He lived largely in the sacred Hindu cities of Prayāga and Varanasi. In those days, the Tughlaq Sultans ruled the region. The Muslim generals and preachers used to oppress the Hindus and prevented them from practicing their Hindu faith openly. A group of Hindus approached Swami Rāmānanda and appealed to him to do something about it. The Swami agreed and decided to use his Yogic powers.

As a result, it so happened that the Muslim priests in Varanasi suddenly became incapable of shouting out their calls of Muslim prayers five times every day. Whenever the time to give out the call to prayer came, the Maulvis (Muslim priests) suddenly seemed to become tongue tied. Some of them realized that it was the result of Swami Rāmānanda's powers.

Therefore, a group of them decided to visit the Swami and intimidate him. But as they approached Swami Rāmānanda's home, he blew a conch shell. All the guests fell into a swoon and had a vision of their prophet Muhammad. In that vision, their prophet told them to listen carefully to what Swami Rāmānanda had to say.

When they came back to their senses, Swami Rāmānanda said, "Bhagavān is One. The same Divine Being creates us all, looks after us and then destroys everything. People worship him in different ways according to the traditions of their own religion. But if He is One indeed, then why do you prevent the Hindus from worshipping their own way? Surely, He cannot belong to Muslims alone! Henceforth, I want you to make sure that:

1. The Jaziya tax that the government takes from the Hindus every month is stopped.
2. No existing Hindu temples are demolished.
3. Hindu scriptures are not destroyed.
4. Cows are not slaughtered.
5. Hindu women are not molested.
6. The ban on temple construction must be removed. Hindus should be allowed to blow conch shells following their ancient traditions of worship.
7. No Hindu should be converted to Islam forcibly.
8. If a Hindu approaches a Muslim saint out of reverence, he should not be persuaded to convert to Islam.
9. There should be no ban on the celebration of Hindu festivals.
10. No one should be prevented from chanting the name of Rama.

11. When a bridegroom is proceeding to his wedding stall on a horse per our ancient custom, he must not be asked to get off the horse when he is in front of a mosque.
12. Hindus must not be forced to pay extra taxes during their festivals like the Kumbha Mela. When the Muslims are celebrating their own festivals like the Muharram, they should not prevent Hindus from celebrating their own festivals if they happen to fall on the same day.”

The Muslim leaders took his message to Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, who was the Sultan of Northern India at that time. When he heard how the Yogic powers had stopped the Maulvis from shouting their calls of prayers, he became scared. He issued a royal proclamation that all the 12 conditions listed by Swami Rāmānanda are agreed to, so that Hindus can practice their religion freely in his Empire.²³

11.2 Sant Kabīr



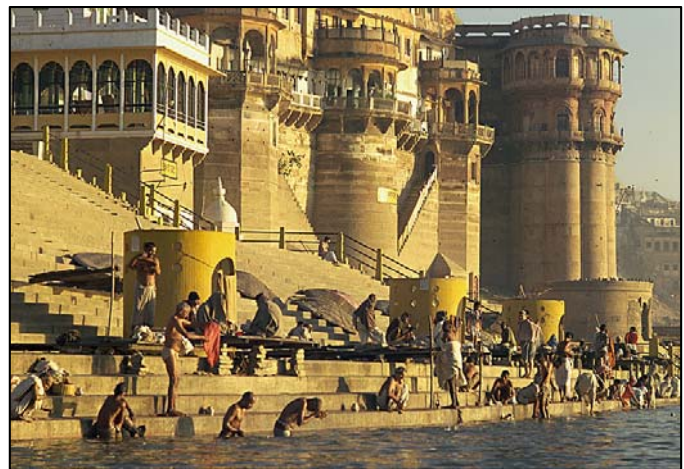
According to Hindu tradition, Kabīr was born to a Hindu widow, who abandoned the newly born child at the bank of a tank close to the city of Varanasi. A Muslim weaver couple found the baby and adopted him as their own child. Back in their home, they called the Muslim priest to search a name for their adopted child from the Koran, the holy book of Islam. But whenever the priest picked a word (as the child’s name) from the Koran, it turned out to be a name that stood for the greatness of God, like Akbar or Kabīr. The Muslim priest did not want to give such a name to the adopted son of a poor weaver couple, and therefore he left without naming the child. However, they decided to name the child as ‘Kabīr’, which is an Arabic word meaning ‘great’ and is used as an adjective of Allah (the Islamic name for God).

Since his childhood, Kabīr was very religious. He liked to listen to religious teachers who came to his neighborhood. But now, he wanted to find a Guru who could teach him more about Bhagavān.

Story: How Sant Kabīr met his Guru

Kabīr, who lived in the holy city of Varanasi, was a very spiritually oriented person and he was searching for a true Guru. He heard that a great Saint named Rāmānanda had arrived with his disciples. He wanted to become a disciple of Rāmānanda but was worried that he might not be accepted because Rāmānanda was a Hindu saint, whereas Kabīr himself had been raised by Muslim parents.

Rāmānanda used to go every morning to take a bath in the Ganga River. On the banks of Ganga in Varanasi, are famous stepped ‘ghats’. Pilgrims descend into the river by walking down the steps of these ghats. One day, when it was early morning and it was still somewhat dark, Kabīr lay flat on one of these steps. Rāmānanda walked towards the river, and accidentally stepped on a leg of Kabīr. He immediately uttered, “Ram, Ram,” in devotion towards Bhagavān and also to apologize to Kabīr. Kabīr was elated and he immediately jumped up, “I have met my Guru, and he has given me the mantra of ‘Ram Ram.’”



Rāmānanda was greatly elated with the faith and sincerity of Kabīr and accepted him as his disciple. In his later years, Kabīr wrote numerous verses in praise of the true Guru. Some of these are translated below –

²³ Poddar and Goswami, p. 344-347

"The Guru as well as Govinda are both standing in front of me and I am in a fix as to whose feet I should bow to first. I decided to touch the feet of the Guru, because he was the one who showed me the path to Govinda. There are many in this world that wear the garb of a Sadhu and beg from home to home. But they are not true Gurus, and in the absence of a true Guru, one's education remains incomplete. Therefore, says Kabīr, even if you have to get your head cut to obtain a true Guru, consider it to be a good bargain!"

Many Hindus were annoyed that although Kabīr was a Muslim (or at least, raised by Muslim parents), he shouldn't chant the name 'Rama' that was used by the Hindus. On the other hand, Muslims were upset that Kabīr behaved like a Hindu, prayed like a Hindu, wore a tilak on his forehead like a Hindu and taught Hindu teachings like reincarnation. Kabīr too criticized both Hindu and Muslim priests for their hypocrisy and wrote verses to make fun of them. A translation of some of these verses is given below. Can you explain what Kabīr is trying to teach through these verses (called 'dohā')?

mālā pherat jug bhayā, phirā na man kā pher | kar kā mankā dār dey, man kā mankā pher ||

"You have spent a long time turning the beads of your japamālā, but you have still not turned your crooked mind. You should leave the beads that you turn in your hands, and instead turn the thoughts of your mind."

kankar pāthar jodi key, masjid lai banāya | tā chadhī mullā bang dey, kyā baharā bhayā khudāya ||

"Collecting pebbles and stones, they have constructed a mosque. Climbing on that, the Muslim priest crows like a cock. Is the Lord deaf?"

Story: The Pig inside the 'Saint'

Sant Kabīr was a very strong critic of hypocrisy. He saw that many priests and ascetics pretended to be very pious and holy men, but were in fact evil minded.

One day, he heard that a fake Fakir (Muslim ascetic) was coming to visit him. To expose this fake Saint, Kabīr tied a pig at the entrance of his home. When the Fakir came to Sant Kabīr's home, he was horrified to see the pig and shouted out loud in anger, "Don't you know that the pig is an unclean animal? Then why have you tied one to the entrance of your home?" Kabīr replied, "My pig is outside my house, whereas your pig is inside your heart."

The Fakir felt so ashamed to hear these words that he went away stealthily.



Irritated by his criticisms, groups of both Hindus and Muslims complained to the local Muslim ruler. He was a very intolerant Muslim ruler and declared that Kabīr must be punished for criticizing Islam. He ordered that Kabīr must be trampled to death by an elephant. But miraculously, the elephant bowed down in front of Kabīr and refused to harm the saint. Then, he was tied in chains and thrown into a river. But he walked ashore, free of chains. He was locked into a house that was set on fire. But the Saint walked through the fire, and emerged totally unharmed. The Sultan was terrified upon hearing of these miracles and he freed Kabīr.

When Kabīr died, Hindus and Muslims started fighting over who could claim his body. The Hindus said, "He taught teachings of our scriptures. His Guru was a Hindu. Therefore, Kabīr should be cremated." But the Muslims said, "His parents were Muslim, and he had a Muslim name. Therefore, he should be buried." As they fought, a voice from the skies said, "Lift the white sheet covering Kabir's body." When the sheet of white cloth was removed, people were shocked to see a heap of flowers

instead of Kabir's dead body. The Hindus and Muslims divided the heap into two halves. The Hindus took their share to Varanasi and cremated the flowers, whereas the Muslims buried their half right where Kabir's body lay. By performing this last miracle, Kabir wanted to teach that we all belong to Bhagavān, whether we are Hindus or Muslims, and therefore we must not fight over religious differences. The miracle also showed that Saints like Kabir do not belong to people of just one religion. Rather, they belong to the entire humanity.

Class Discussion:

In many verses called dohās, Kabir taught beautiful messages to his disciples so that they could lead pure lives. Because of their beauty and simplicity, millions of Hindus memorize Kabir's verses. Can you explain the meaning of these verses?

jo toko kāntā boye, tāhi boyī tū phūl | toko phūl ke phūl hain, bāko sab tirsūl ||

"If someone places thorns in your path, you should reply by throwing flowers in his path. Because, you will finally get only flowers, whereas he will get thorns."

badā huā to kyā huā jaise ped khajūr | panthi ko chhāyā nahīn, phal lāgey atī dūr |

"So what if you are a great man? You are like that tree of date palm that does not provide any shade to the traveler. And its fruit is too far away to pluck for food."

11.3 Sant Dādū Dayāl

Story: The violent attacker of Sant Dādū Dayāl becomes his disciple

Sant Dadu lived outside a city in the region of North West India. Gradually, his fame as a devotee of Bhagavān spread. People from afar started coming to listen to his sermons on Bhakti, and to participate in his worship programs.

The Kotwāl (police chief) of the city also happened to hear about Sant Dadu. He thought, "Let me travel to see him, and derive benefit from his teachings." He set out on his horseback. When he was outside the city, he came across a man cleaning the path of thorns and level it all alone. The Kotwāl asked the man, "Do you know where Sant Dādū lives?" But the man was lost in his work and did not respond. The Kotwāl asked again in a loud voice, but the man merely looked up and smiled.



The Kotwāl really got angry and thought, "How dare he smile at me as if I am a joker!" He took a whip and lashed the man a few times, before proceeding further. A little distance ahead, he encountered another man and asked him, "Have you seen Sant Dādū? Where does he live?"

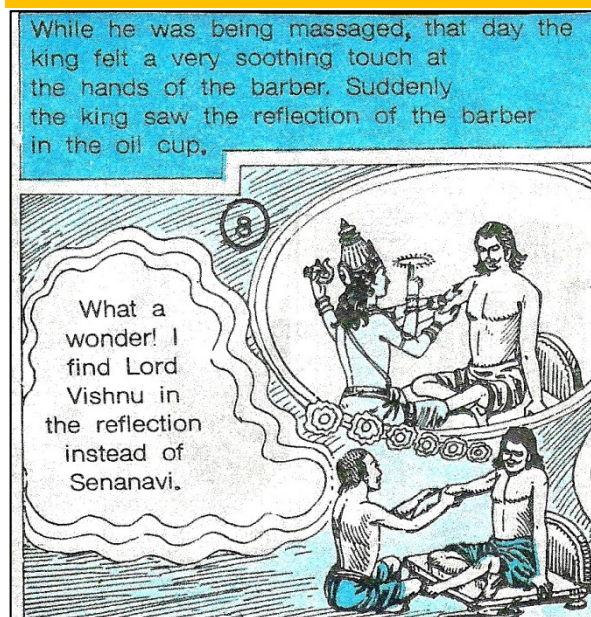
The second man replied, "Sant Dādū spends this time of the day cleaning the paths of thorns and level them so that the travelers can cover their journey more easily. Did you not see him on the way?"

When the Kotwāl heard this, he was horrified. He rushed back to the first man and said, "Respected Sant Dādū, I whipped you in ignorance. Please forgive me. Why did you not say that you are Sant Dādū when I whipped you?" Sant Dādū replied lovingly, "The path to Bhagavān is littered with thorns of anger, jealousy, pride and other evils. Unless you pluck these evils from the path of spiritual journey, how can you hope to reach Bhagavān? You will benefit from my sermons on Bhakti only if

you have first plucked out these thorns from your mind."

The Kotwāl fell at the feet of the Sant and begged for forgiveness once more. He promised to work on his anger issues, become forgiving and become a humble man. He accepted Sant Dādū as his Guru, and thanked him for showing him the true path towards Bhagavān.

11.4 Sena the Barber



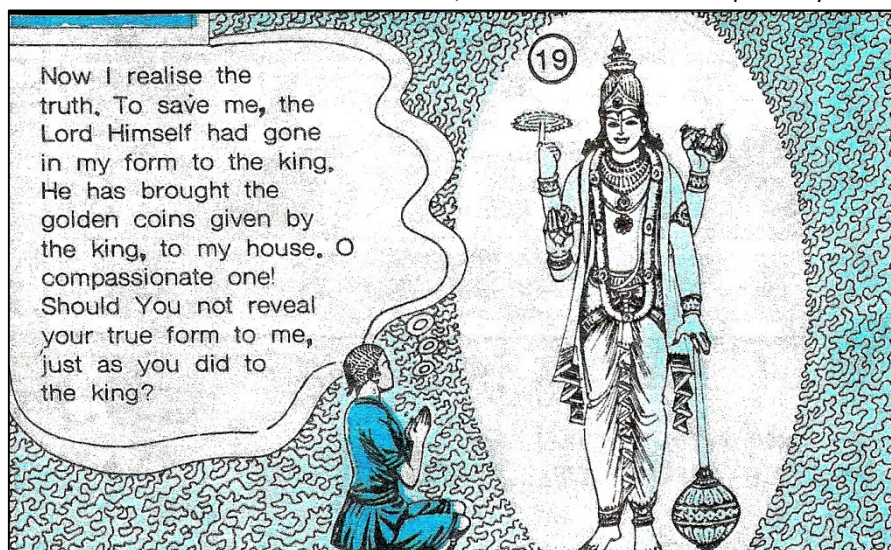
While he was being massaged, that day the king felt a very soothing touch at the hands of the barber. Suddenly the king saw the reflection of the barber in the oil cup, reflection of four armed Vishnu. He looked up to Sena, but saw him as usual, and not a four armed Divine Deity. The King looked multiple times into the bowl, but always, he saw the beautiful form of Vishnu reflected.

That day, instead of giving the usual fee, he slipped several gold coins into the bag of Sena. Sena left, but the King was so mesmerized at the Darshana of Vishnu that he had to be shaken up by his attendants to get up and take his bath.

Later, in the court, the King asked his attendants to rush to Sena's home and ask him to appear in front of him promptly. Sena thought that the King would be furious with him for not showing up that morning for the shave. As he entered the court, the King got down from his throne and bowed to Sena, and welcomed him respectfully. The courtiers were aghast to see their King bow to a humble barber.

Sena apologized to the King for not coming that morning. But the King asked him to check his bag for gold coins. Now, Sena was surprised that his bag actually had gold coins. It did not take Sena and the King long to understand what had happened. Bhagavān Vishnu had Himself appeared disguised as Sena that morning to protect his humble devotee from the wrath of the King.

The King bowed to Sena and touched his feet. He said, "Truly the scriptures say that great are the rewards of Satsanga, or companionship of Saints. Today, because of you, I was able to get a Darshana of Bhagavān Vishnu, who is sought by millions in this world!"



11.5 Sant Ravidās

In Varanasi lived a humble cobbler named Ravidās, who used to make his living by repairing the leather shoes of his customers. In those days, cobblers were looked down upon as unclean by others because they handled leather which came from the hides of dead animals. However, Ravidās did his work diligently, and constantly remembered God and sang his praises in his heart while working.

One day, a Brahmana knowledgeable in all Hindu scriptures came to Ravidās to get his shoe repaired. Out of humility and respect for the scholarly Brahmana, Ravidās refused to take any money from him for repairing the shoe but asked him for a favor. Ravidās had saved a small copper coin from his hard earned money, and he requested the Brahmana to offer it to Mother Ganga when he went to Haridwar, another holy city on the River Ganga. But Ravidās insisted – “Do not just throw my coin into the river. First say to Mother Ganga that Ravidās has sent this gift for you. If only she stretches out her hand, place the coin on it. Otherwise, do not offer it to Mother Ganga.”

The Brahmana was amused and thought that Ravidās was a fool to think that a hand would stretch out of the river Ganga to accept his coin. Nevertheless, when he went to Haridwar, he did do what Ravidās had requested. Suddenly, a hand stretched out of the River to take the coin and said – “I am glad to accept my son Ravidās’ gift to me.” The Brahmana was shocked, but the hand came out again - this time holding a beautiful golden bangle. River Ganga then spoke in a human voice – “I am sending this gift for my beloved son Ravidās. When you travel to Varanasi, please give this bangle as a gift to him on my behalf.”

The Brahmana became greedy upon getting the bangle. He thought – “Who will believe that River Ganga gifted a precious bangle to a poor and ignorant cobbler Ravidās? I will gift this beautiful bangle to the King, and he will give me a lot of money in return.” The Brahmana took the bangle to the King who gifted it to the Queen. But the Queen wanted an identical bangle for her other wrist too. The King now warned the Brahmana – “Go and get me another identical bangle, or I will get you imprisoned.”



The poor Brahmana did not know what to do. So he took the bangle to Ravidās in Varanasi and narrated the whole story. Ravidās did not feel angry with the Brahmana at all. Instead, he said – “I am so happy that my mother Ganga sent me a gift.” Then he brought a bowl of water in which he used to dip pieces of leather (to make them soft) that he used for repairing shoes, and said – “If my mind is pure, may Mother Ganga appear in this bowl.” (*‘jab man changaa to katori mein ganga’*).

A miracle happened – the Brahmana saw the River Ganga flowing inside the bowl, and he also saw several similar bangles in the bed of the river. Saint Ravidās then pulled out a bangle and gave it to the Brahmana, asking him

to give the 2 bangles to the King.

The Brahmana was greatly humbled. He realized that all his mastery over scriptures was worth nothing in front of the humility, purity of mind, simplicity and devotion of Ravidās- a mere cobbler. He went to the King and narrated the whole story to him. The King was amazed and the entire royal family turned up to honor Ravidās. Everyone used to think that Ravidās was dirty because he was a cobbler who worked with an unclean material like leather. But so pure was the mind of Ravidās, that River Ganga (which itself is said to purify us when we take a dip in it) considered Ravidās as Her own son.

Today, the birthday of Sant Ravidās is a Federal holiday in India and sixteen of his compositions have been included in Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of Sikhs.

12. Saints of Western India (Maharashtra, Gujarat) & Sindh (Pakistan)

12.1 Bhagavān Krishna blesses his Bhakta Pundalika

In the city of Pandharpur, there lived a man named Pundalika with his wife and with his old parents. Pundalika did not respect his parents at all. One day, his parents said to Pundalika, "Son, we want to go to the holy city called Varanasi. Can you take us there?" Pundalika replied rudely, "I do not have time. You can go on your own."

The parents became very sad. They had no money to go to Varanasi. So they just started walking towards Varanasi, thinking that they will beg for food every day on their way. But, after a few days, Pundalika thought that he should have been nice to his parents. He felt bad at what he had done to them. One night, he could not sleep. He woke up his wife, and they set out on their horses to look for his parents. Luckily, he found them soon on the way to Varanasi. He took them respectfully on horseback to Varanasi, and after the pilgrimage was over, they all returned home.



Now onwards, Pundalika was a changed man. He was now devoted to his parents. He served them lovingly, gave food to them, pressed their feet when they were tired, and read holy books to them when they wanted. Far away in the city of Dwaraka, Krishna heard about the beautiful change in the behavior of Pundalika and He decided to visit him. Krishna's wife Rukmani said, "Why are You going to visit Pundalika? He does not even do a Puja to you." Krishna replied, "Pundalika worships his parents, serves them lovingly and gives them everything that they want. This is just like worshipping Me, because I am the Father and the Mother of the whole

creation."

When Krishna reached Pundalika's home, the latter was absorbed in massaging his father's feet and therefore did not pay attention to the visitor. But when he noticed the divine light coming from the body of Krishna, he turned around and said, "My Lord, I am serving my parents right now and cannot leave the feet of my father



unattended. But I am throwing this brick at you. Kindly use this as a stool till I am done with my father, and then I will come and attend to you. Krishna humbly stood on the brick, waiting patiently for Pundalika, with His hands on his waist.

When Pundalika's father went to sleep, he went to the door to welcome Krishna. The Lord was so pleased with Pundalika's respect for his parents now, that he asked Pundalika to request a boon from Him. Pundalika had just one request, "Bhagavān, please stay with me forever on this brick." Krishna agreed and transformed Himself into the **Murti** of 'Vitthala' ('Vit' = brick; 'sthala' = location, station).

Pundalika too became a Saint after some time. When he died, people constructed a Shiva Mandir on his grave. And Bhaktas constructed a Mandir where Bhagavān Krishna had decided to stay in the form of the **Murti**. This story shows how Pundalika earned the blessings of Bhagavān by doing his duty towards his parents.

The Mandir of Pandharpur has developed into a great center of Hindu Dharma since it was founded. Many Saints and Bhaktas have been associated with the Mandir for the last 800 years or more. These include Nāmadeva, Jnāneshvara, Chokhamela, Kūrmadāsa and so on. In this chapter, we will narrate numerous incidents from their lives from which we can learn a lot.

12.2 Bhakta Nāmadeva

Story: Namadeva Learns the True Meaning of Bhakti (Devotion to Bhagavān)

One day, Sant Jnāneshvara and several other Saints visited Pandharpur. They praised Namadeva for his saintly behavior. But, Jnāneshvara realized that for Namadeva, Bhagavān lived only in the Mūrti of the temple of

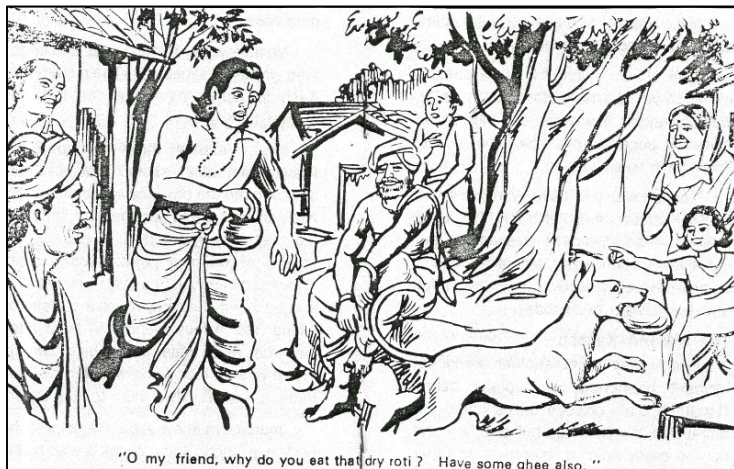


Vitthala in Pandharpur. One day, Jnāneshvara called a potter named Gora and asked him, “You can find out with your stick whether a pot is baked or not. Can you also tap your stick on the heads of all the Bhaktas here and tell us who is a baked (experienced) Bhakta and who is unbaked (inexperienced)?” Gora did as told. And to everyone’s surprise, he said, “Namadeva seems to be an inexperienced Bhakta in this crowd.”

Namadeva felt hurt. He decided to go to the temple of Vithoba to demand an explanation from Bhagavān. But, Bhagavān instead said to him in a dream, “Go to the Shiva Mandir of Mallikārjuna. There, you will find Visobā Khechara, who is a great Bhakta of Shiva. Accept him as your Guru, and he will teach you how to become a perfect Bhakta.”

When Namadeva reached the Shiva Mandir, he was shocked at what he saw. Visobā was sleeping inside the Mandir with his feet towards the Shivalinga, an insult to Bhagavān Shiva. Namadeva thought, “How can Vitthala ask me to become this foolish man’s student?” He woke up Visobā and said, “Do you realize that your feet are pointing towards the Shivalinga?” Visobā replied, “Yes, but I am old and too weak to move them. Please do me a favor. Move my feet in a direction away from the Shivalinga.”

But when Namadeva touched his feet, he saw a strange vision. He saw Shiva in all directions – in the walls, in



the pillars, the ceiling, the floor of the Mandir, and in all the other bhaktas who gathered there. Namadeva got the message, which was that Bhagavān is present not just in the Mūrti, but everywhere. When Namadeva understood this true meaning of bhakti, he became a ‘baked’ Bhakta. A transformation came in his behavior.

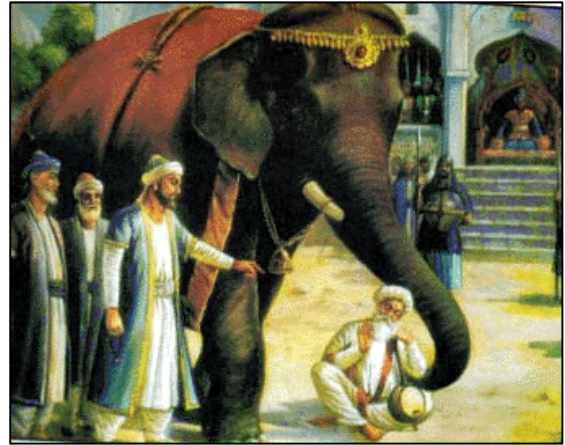
Once, Namadeva was preparing his food when a dog suddenly grabbed his rotis and ran away. Namadeva saw Bhagavān in the dog too. He ran after the dog crying, “Wait, please do not run away with dry rotis. I will put some ghee on them for you.”

Story: Namadeva's Faith in Dharma

The Saint was once forced to convert to Islam by the Muslim ruler Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1325 – 51 CE), who had invaded the area in which Namadeva lived. Namadeva was ordered to chant Islamic prayers, instead of saying the names of Vishnu.

But Namadeva would not stop singing the names of Bhagavān Vishnu. The Sultan was greatly enraged. He had a cow slaughtered and brought in front of Namadeva and asked him to bring back the cow to life, or risk his own throat get slit. Namadeva protested and said that no one can bring a dead creature back to life.

The Sultan got infuriated and had a mad elephant attack Namadeva. But when the elephant hit Namadeva's forehead with its trunk, it felt a great pain instead and fled away from Namadeva. The Saint was miraculously unhurt by the attack of the elephant. But the Sultan would not relent, and had Namadeva tied in chains and tortured. Yet, Namadeva would still not stop singing the names of Lord Vishnu. Namadeva's mother begged Namadeva to save his life by switching from singing the names of Lord Vishnu to reciting Islamic prayers. But Namadeva would not relent, and stood steadfast in his devotion to Lord Vishnu. After several hours, the chained and tortured Namadeva saw a vision of Lord Vishnu approaching him, seated on the Garuda.



Namadeva asked the Muslim ruler to have the calf of the slaughtered cow to be brought in front of the mother for suckling. The Sultan made fun of Namadeva, and to prove to Namadeva that his faith in Lord Vishnu was useless, he asked the calf to be brought in front of its dead mother anyway.

But a miracle happened. As soon as the calf came near, the cow became alive and milk started flowing out of its teats. The slaves of the Sultan filled an entire bucket with the milk and showed it to the Sultan, to prove that Namadeva had brought the cow back to life.

The Sultan was terrified when he saw the miracle of Namadeva. He asked Namadeva to forgive him. Namadeva asked the Sultan to give up cruelty and arrogance. All the Hindus gathered around Namadeva and praised him with a sigh of relief, and said that his glory will last forever. Namadeva is considered a Saint not just by Hindus, but also by Sikhs.

Story: Namadeva teaches the value of the name of Rama

In the town of Pandharpur, there lived a wealthy merchant named Vimal. He was proud of his riches. One day, to show off his generosity, he announced that he wanted to donate his body's weight in gold. Every one – poor, rich, Brahmanas etc. came to get their share, and returned enriched with the donation. Everyone was full praise of Vimal. However, there was one prominent person of the town who did not come – Sant Namadeva.

The merchant then sent a messenger to summon Namadeva but he did not respond. A second messenger was sent, but Namadeva did not come. Finally, only after a third messenger was sent that Namadeva came to see Vimal.

The merchant said in an anguished tone, "Why did you not come to collect your share? Did you think that I will not give you enough? Please accept some gold from me, because it will give me punya. By accepting my charity, you will save my honor. If you do not take anything, people will say sarcastically that I am a miser who did not donate any money to you."

But Namadeva responded, "I have no use for money. You have already donated a lot of gold to others. If I too take gold from you, then there will not be enough left with you!"

But Vimal laughed and said, “Do not worry Sant-ji, I will give you as much gold as you wish. I am a rich man. Tell me how much do you want.”

Namadeva responded, “Just give me enough to equal the weight of a Tulsi leaf.”

Namadeva then wrote the name of Rama on the leaf, and placed it on one of the pans of the merchant’s weighing scale. The merchant flippantly placed a gold coin on the other pan, but the leaf was surprisingly heavier. The merchant started placing more gold, then bags of coins of gold and silver, and finally his gems. But the leaf bearing pan still seemed higher!

Disgraced, he asked his wife to take off her jewelry and place it on the pan, but to no avail. The entire town showed up to watch the miraculous spectacle. The other merchants thought, “One of our own is getting humiliated. Let us also put our wealth to give to the Sant.” They too started adding gold and silver, but the pan bearing the Tulsi leaf with the name of Ram on it would not budge!

Vimal now begged forgiveness and said, “Tell me Sant Namadeva, what more can I give to you?” Namadeva replied, “I want all the punya that you have earned due to your good deeds.” Vimal agreed, and with some water in his hands, he prayed to the Devatas, “If I have done any good deeds, then let their punya add to the weight of the pan containing the wealth.” But the pan with the Tulsi leaf was still heavier! Other merchants also came forward – some had performed great yajnas, some had undertaken many pilgrimages, and others had given many charities. They all now vied with one another to give all of their punya to Sant Namdev’s pan of leaf. But the pan with the leaf was still heavier!

Vimal now cried and said, “Sant Namadeva, I do not know of your mysterious power. But now I know that whatever you accept will reach Rama himself. Therefore, please accept our wealth.”

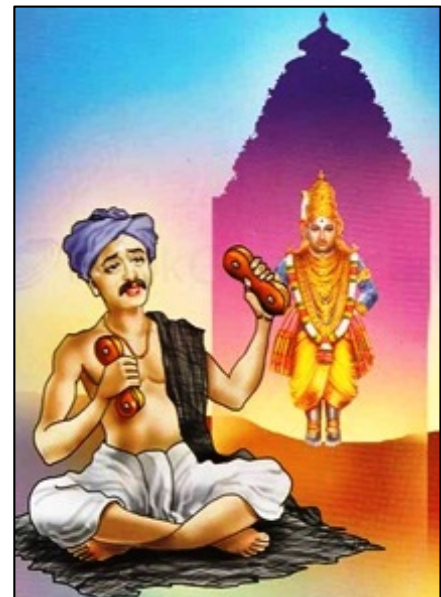
Namadeva replied, “You are not giving for the sake of Rama, but only to inflate your pride and show off your greatness. If you had really given it from your heart to please Rama, then I would have accepted it with reverence. Why should I take your wealth to boost your ego? It is all waste and worthless in comparison to devotion to Rama.”

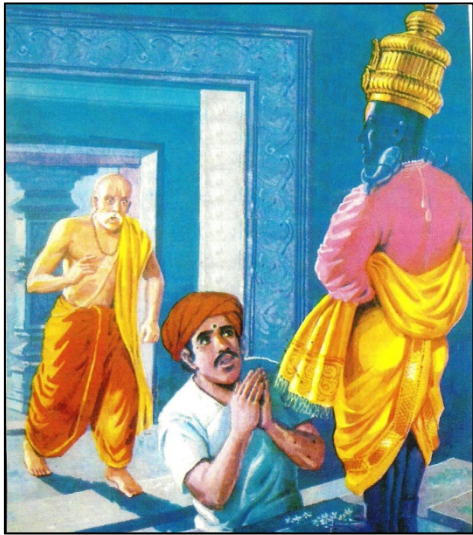
Saying this, he picked the leave of Tulsi. The pan now swung up and the pan with the gold fell to the ground with a thud. Sant Namadeva picked his Tulsi leaf that had the name of Rama written on it, and left the gathering. The merchants and the onlookers felt blessed that they had been made to witness the glory of Rama’s name by a Sant.

12.3 Chokha Melā (14th century CE)

Chokha Melā was born in a low caste of Hindus. His profession was to remove dead animals from people’s homes and farms. Due to the nature of his profession that he had inherited from his father he was regarded unfairly as ‘unclean’, and was not allowed to enter temples. However, Chokha Melā was a great Bhakta of Bhagavān Vitthala of Pandharpur and spent his free time chanting his praises and composing song to worship him.

Sant Nāmadeva believed that all human beings have an equal right to worship Bhagavān. He accepted Chokha as his student. But, the priests of the Mandir would not allow Chokha to enter the Mandir at all. Chokha Melā constructed a hut on the opposite bank of the river so that he could at least see the Mandir from his home, and also the mūrti from the entrance door. One night, Chokha Melā felt very sad at not being able to enter the Vitthala Mandir. However, Bhagavān Vitthala spoke to him in his heart and said, “My son, people are foolish if they think that you can pollute the Mandir by entering it just because you handle dead animals. If someone could pollute me, then I would not be Bhagavān. Do not despair. Go to the Mandir, I am waiting for you.”





Chokha rushed to the temple which had been locked for the night. Miraculously, the doors opened and Chokha entered it, and spent the night singing bhajans till he fell asleep. In the morning, when the priest entered, he was shocked to see Chokha at the feet of the Mūrti and ordered him to leave at once. But, he felt guilty, and followed Chokha quietly across the river. From his hiding place, he heard Chokha Melā sing bhajans, and Bhagavān Vitthala talking to Chokha in his heart. The priest thought that it was just Chokha talking to himself.

The priest got very angry. He entered the hut and slapped Chokha saying, “Do you think we are fools? You talk to yourself all the time, and tell people that Vitthala comes and speaks to you.” I do not want you anywhere near the Mandir again. In reality, the priest was not able to see Bhagavān because his heart was not as pure as Chokha. Due to the blow, Chokha’s cheek became swollen. When the priest returned to the Mandir, he was shocked to see that the cheek of the Mūrti had become swollen! Clearly, the priest had hurt Bhagavān Vitthala by hitting at Chokha. He consulted with other priests, and respectfully asked Chokha Melā to enter the temple. Once inside the Mandir, Chokha Melā sang a song and asked Bhagavān to forgive the priests and heal his cheek.



After sometime, Chokha Melā moved to a place called Mangalavedhā near Pandharpur. One day, he was constructing a wall, but the wall collapsed and killed him. Several other laborers who were working with Chokha also got killed. Several years later, Sant Nāmadeva arrived and decided to give a grand funeral to this great Bhakta of Bhagavān. But the problem was the separation of Chokha’s bones from those of other victims. Sant Nāmadeva picked one bone after another, and he separated Chokha Melā’s bones from that of others because Sant Chokha Melā’s bones had the chant ‘Vitthala Vitthala’ still coming from them.

Sant Nāmadeva took these bones to the Mandir and buried them at the entrance. A blue colored structure today stands at this site, and all visitors worship Sant Chokha Melā at this structure before entering the Pandharpur Mandir. Sant Chokha Melā’s life shows that Bhagavān does not discriminate between his bhaktas and loves everyone equally

irrespective of which family, gender or profession we belong to.

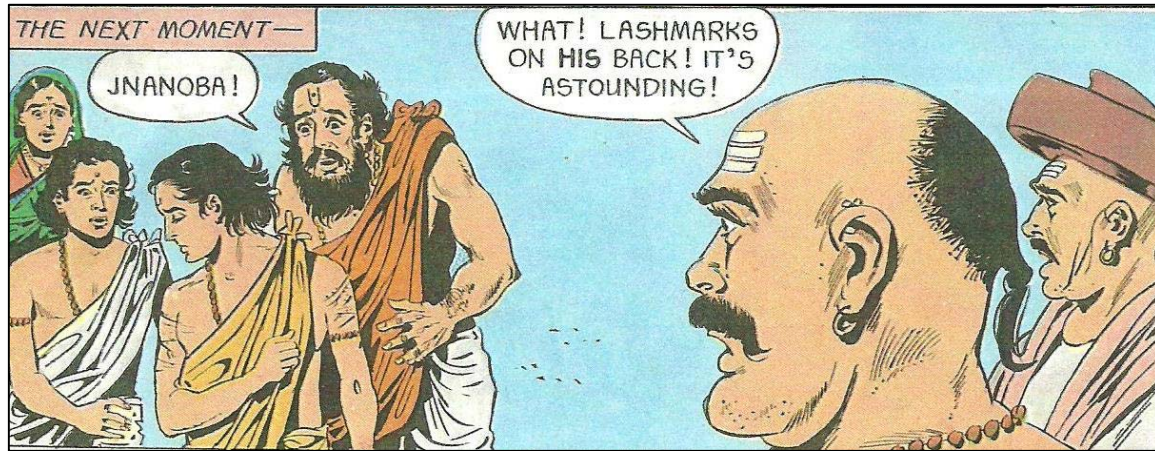
12.4 Sant Jnāneshvara

Sant Jnaneshvara’s father had become a Sannyasi, but he returned to his wife at the command of his Guru. It was after his return to a householder’s life that Jnaneshvara and his siblings were born to the couple. In the Hindu society, once a man becomes a Sannyasi, he cannot return to the state of a householder. Therefore, the society shunned the four children and refused to accept them in their midst.

The family therefore proceeded to Paithan, a town famous for its Pandits, and the father begged them to admit the kids to their school. But the Pandits mocked, “If the child’s name is already Jnaneshvara (the Lord of Knowledge) then what is the use of his going to school?”

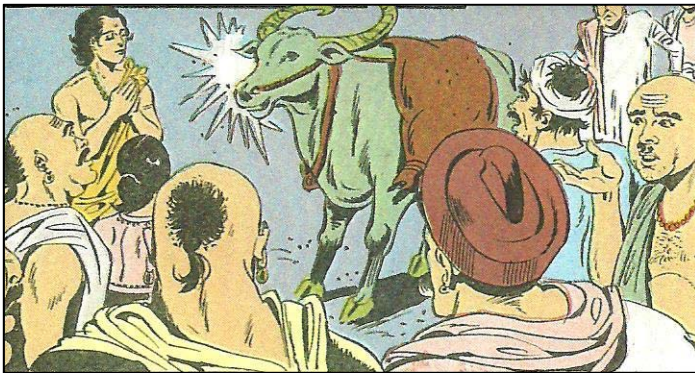
Suddenly, a water man was seen goading his buffalo to move forward on the road. He addressed the buffalo by its name, ‘Jnana’. The Pandits laughed and said, “Even this buffalo is called Jnana. Then is there any difference between Jnaneshvara and the buffalo?”

Jnaneshvara said, “No respected Pandits, there is really no difference. The same Atman dwells inside all of us.” Just then, the water man whipped the buffalo because the creature was removing to budge. As he hit the buffalo, the Pandits were shocked to see that the marks of the lashes started appearing on Jnaneshvara’s back instead!



Jnaneshvara said, “Indeed, no one is high or low because the same Paramatman resides within us all.”

The Pandits would not give up. They said, “If you and the buffalo are the same, can that animal also chant the Vedas?” Jnaneshvara walked up to the buffalo and placed his hand upon its head. And to the astonishment of everyone, the buffalo started chanting the Veda Mantras!



The arrogant Pandits realized that Jnaneshvara and his siblings were saints, not ordinary children. They prostrated in front of them and sought forgiveness. They also offered to conduct the thread ceremony for the children.

However, the children decided to become ascetics, and therefore no longer needed the sacred thread. They left Paithan and became roaming ascetics. The buffalo Jnana also followed the children wherever they went till its death.

Jnāneshvara and Yogī Chāṅgadeva

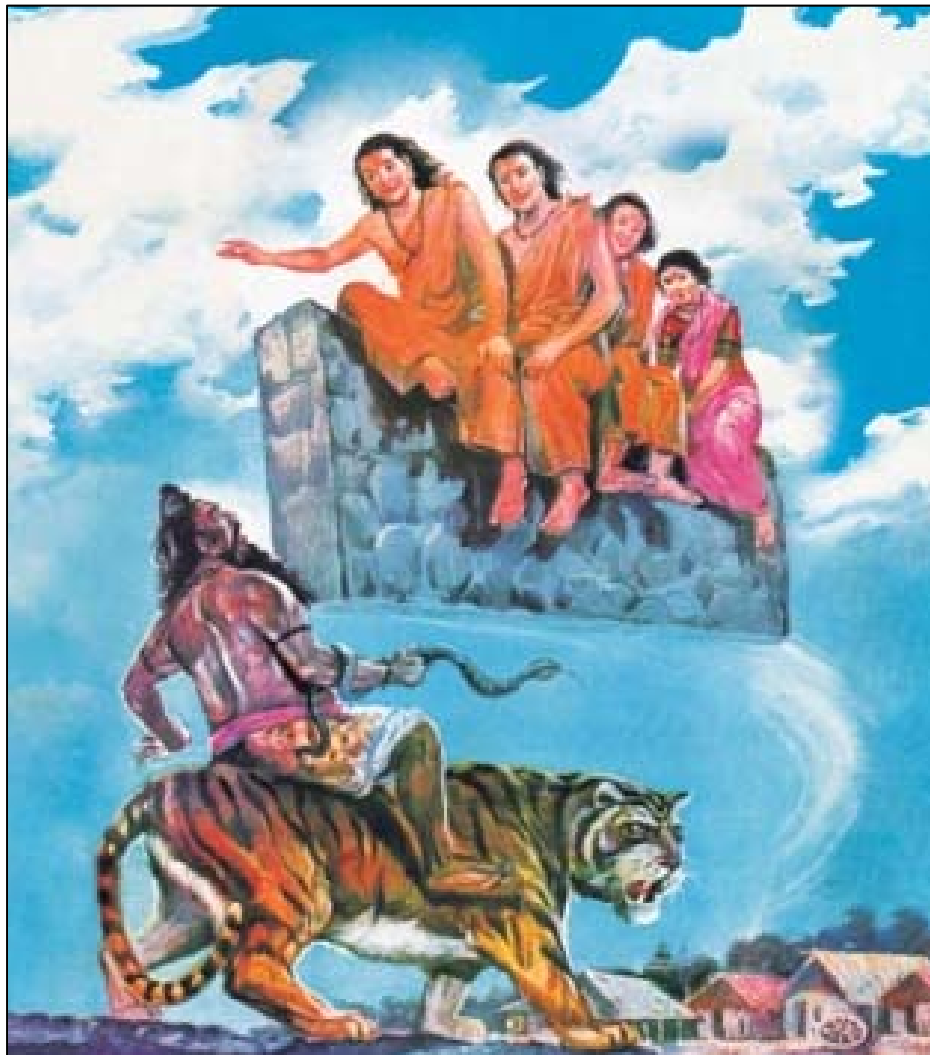
Yogi Chāṅgadeva had lived a long life of 1400 years due to his practice of intense yogic exercises. But, his mind was still full of ego and pride. One day, he heard that a 16 year old saint named Jnāneshvara was in his area, along with his 2 other saintly brothers and a saintly younger sister named Muktābai.

He wanted to meet them, with the aim to make them his disciples. But he wondered, “How shall I invite them? I do not want to address them as ‘Respected Jnāneshvara’ because that will mean that I am inferior to him. Nor do I want to address him as ‘Chiranjeevi’ (long lived) because I am almost 100 times older to him.” Thinking thus, he sent a blank piece of paper as an invitation through one of his students.

When Jnāneshvara saw the blank piece of paper, he smiled. His sister Muktābai understood that Chāṅgadeva’s pride prevented him from writing an appropriate invitation method. She could not help commenting to Chāṅgadeva’s disciple, “Your Guru may have lived 1400 years. But I am sorry to say that his life is as blank as this piece of paper.”

Sant Jnāneshvara then wrote the message of Hindu spirituality (Vedānta) in 65 Marathi verses on that piece of paper. He titled these verses, “Chāṅgadeva Prashasti’ (‘In Praise of Chāṅgadeva) which are considered a holy book even today by the Hindus.

When their message reached Chāṅgadeva, he was livid with anger as well as pride. Moreover, he was not able to understand these verses at all. He decided to teach the four teenagers a lesson. He summoned a tiger to become his mount, and took a snake as a whip in his hand. Onlookers marveled Chāṅgadeva's command over the animals, as he rode the tiger towards the place where the four saintly siblings were staying.



When Jnāneshvara got the advance message that Chāṅgadeva was riding a tiger towards them, using a snake as a whip, he was disappointed with Chāṅgadeva's pride. At that time, the four of them were sitting on a wall. Sant Jnāneshvara commanded the wall to fly towards Chāṅgadeva.

When Chāṅgadeva saw the four of them flying towards him, seated on a wall, he was amazed. He got off his tiger and bowed before the Sant saying, "You are surely greater than I am. I can command other living creatures to do my bidding. But even non-living things obey your commands." He became a disciple of Sant Jnāneshvara, who asked him to become a student of Muktābai instead.

The wall which flew at Jnāneshvara's request is still existent and is worshipped by the Hindus of the Warkari tradition. There are also several temples in that area dedicated to Chāṅgadeva, who is worshipped because of his association with Sant Jnāneshvara.

12.5 Sant Ekanath (1533 – 1599)

He was a great scholar of Sanskrit who wrote his books in the language of Maharashtra, so that the common man could understand the teachings of our holy books. Numerous stories are narrated from his life, which show his saintly qualities.

Story: Sant Ekanath shows that the greatest worship is to do good to others

One day, Ekanath was taking a bath in the River Godavari when he saw a poor woman arrive with her infant and a bucket to fill some water. After she had filled her bucket with the water, she started walking back towards her home alone, and forgetting to carry the infant. The baby soon started crying and caught Ekanath's attention. He rushed to the baby and picked him lovingly in his arms. He followed the woman and then gave the baby to her as she was just entering her home. The mother realized her absent-mindedness, and cried with joy to see her baby back in her arms. She thanked Ekanath for returning her child to her.

When the news of this incident spread in the village, several Brahmanas got very upset. They approached him and said, “Ekanath, you are a Brahmana. Then how come you picked up the child of an untouchable and even went to their home? We think that you have committed a sin and therefore you must bathe 108 times in the Godavari to purify yourself.”



Ekanath was shocked and he said, “How can you be so heartless? The child was crying and it was my duty to pick him up and take him to his mother.” But the Brahmanas would not listen to Ekanath and an argument started.

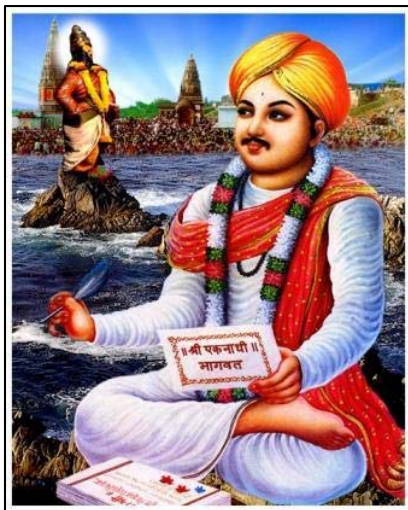
Just then, a leper arrived and said, “I am coming from the temple of Vithoba in Pandharpur. When I worshipped Vithoba (Krishna) to cure my disease, he asked me to come to your village in search of a Sant named Ekanath. Krishna told me that by returning the baby of untouchable parents to his mother, Ekanath had accumulated

a lot of good Karma. If Ekanath gives me even a portion of this good Karma, then my leprosy will get cured.”

Ekanath replied, “I am Ekanath, and I am the one who returned the baby to his mother. I do not know if I have earned any good Karma by doing this deed, because I just wanted to do my duty. But if it helps you, I will give you all of my good karma.” Saying this, Ekanath took a spoonful of water in his hands, and recited the name of Vishnu with great devotion. Then he sprinkled the water on the leper.

And lo, a miracle happened! The leper got cured in front of everyone’s eyes. The narrow minded Brahmanas were now ashamed. They had thought that Ekanath had committed a sin by helping an untouchable family. But clearly in the eyes of Krishna, Ekanath had done a very good Karma by doing so.²⁴

Story: Sant Ekanath gives his holy water from Ganga to a donkey



Once, Sant Ekanath was travelling from Varanasi in North India towards Rameshvaram in South India with some water from the Ganga River. It is a Hindu tradition to offer Ganga water to the Shiva-linga at Rameshvaram. On their way, he and his disciples were travelling through an extremely hot and dry part of India.

Everyone wanted to quench their thirst but the only water was the Ganga water they were carrying. No one wanted to drink it himself because it was meant for worship at Rameshvaram. Suddenly, Ekanath saw a donkey lying on the ground, dying of thirst.

Ekanath was filled with compassion. He immediately took his pitcher of the Ganga water, and poured it into the mouth of the dying donkey. With its thirst quenched, the donkey revived. Shocked at this act, a disciple asked Ekanath, “Guru-ji, we have travelled hundreds of miles with this holy water to perform worship in Rameshvaram. Now where will we get the water of Ganga for our worship of Rameshvaram’s Shiva now?” Ekanath replied, “This is my

²⁴ Krishnamani, pp. 154-155

Rameshvara.”

Ekanath demonstrated through his deed that Bhagavān resides even in a donkey, and if we cannot treat animals with compassion, we cannot claim that we love Bhagavān.

Story: The Forgiveness of Sant Ekanath

“Once, as Ekanath was coming out of the river after his bath in the Godavari, a Muslim spat on him. Ekanath however, was not in the least perturbed and simply returned to the river and bathed again. This happened again and again, and still Ekanath did not get angry. Finally, the Muslim understood that Ekanath was not an ordinary person and apologized. Ekanath simply replied that he himself was in the wrong to get in the Muslim’s way, and that he had had the benefit of taking so many baths in the Godavari. Then he said, “Let Allah bless you!”

The Muslim was surprised and asked him why he did it. Ekanath replied, “Brother, God is One, whether you call Him Allah or Krishna or any other name you like. He abides in you, in me, and in all the objects on this earth. If one tries, one can see Him everywhere, as I see you and you see me.”²⁵

Story: Sant Eknath reforms his son-in-law

Sant Eknath was a renowned saint of Maharashtra. He married his daughter to a famous scholar (Pandit) of the region. Unfortunately, this scholar fell into bad company. He started going out of his home late in the night, leaving his wife alone. Ekanath’s daughter became very worried about her husband’s behavior and she spoke to her father about it.

Eknath then called his son in law and said, “Look here my son in law. You are a learned man, but my daughter is not. Do her a favor. Before you leave your home every night, please read to her a verse or two of the Bhagavad Gita. This will benefit her greatly. Then, you can go out wherever you please.” The Pandit agreed. So every night before he stepped out, he would read a couple of verses of the Bhagavad Gita to his wife, and explain the meaning to her.

Gradually, the Pandit realized how beautiful the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita were. They started having an influence on his own mind. After some time, with the effect of the Gita, the Pandit stopped going out at the night. He had not intended to study the Gita for his own benefit. But nevertheless, the study of the holy book for the sake of his wife impacted him too in a positive way, and he became a virtuous man.



12.6 Sant Tukārām (1608 – 1649 CE)

Sant Tukārām was a low-caste Hindu who lived a mere 41 years (1608 – 1649). He lived a very difficult life and lost his money, children, and his honor. He remarried, but the second wife was very cruel to him. He was a very saintly person. Once, the great Hindu Emperor Shivaji approached him and requested him to become his Guru. Sant Tukārām instead asked him to meet with Swami Samarthā Rāmadāsa and request him to be his Guru instead. Shivaji agreed to Sant Tukārām’s suggestion.

Tukārām wrote thousands of beautiful poems called ‘abhangs’ in his mother tongue. Crowds of people gathered around him and sang these abhangs with bhakti towards Vitthala. A local Pandit named Rāmeshwar Bhat became very jealous of Tukārām. He started spreading the rumor that Tukārām’s abhangs were misleading the people about the true teachings of Vedas and other Hindu scriptures. It was a sin to sing and listen to these abhangs because only Brahmins could teach others about Dharma, and because religious teaching should be given only from Sanskrit scriptures, not through local languages like Marathi, in which the abhangs were written.



²⁵ Pravrajika Suddhatmaprana, p. 162.

A meeting of the local Pandits was called, and in an act of great injustice, Tukārām was ordered to throw the books in which he had written his abhangs into the river. With tears in his eyes, he obeyed the command, and threw his books into the waters. The people who had gathered to watch the event saw with great anguish the pages of the booklets being carried away by the waters. Tukārām was also ordered not to write any more new abhangs.



This injustice greatly saddened Sant Tukārām. One day, he sat on the banks of the river and cried, “Bhagavān Vitthala, what you did to me was not fair. I have had a very difficult life. I lost all my wealth. My sons died. My first wife died and my second wife is very cruel to me. But when I wrote these abhangs to you, I forgot my sorrows and ill-luck and felt happy that at least You loved me. I never complained to you. But now, even my abhangs through which I spoke to you, have been taken away from me. Why don’t you take my life too?”

Tukārām wept and sang his sorrow in the form of an abhang. And a miracle happened. As the onlookers watched in surprise, his books re-appeared from the waters, with no damage from water to a single page or to the writing!

Tukārām was greatly moved by the mercy of Bhagavān Vitthala and sang, “I am sorry that I doubted your love. You are more loving than my mother. You have shown your mercy on a humble man like me. Please grant me a wish that I find always a place at your lotus like beautiful feet.”

Every one praised the bhakti of Tukārām. Rāmeshwar Bhatt and his fellow Pandits felt great shame at the miracle and became Tukārām’s disciples. Sant Tukārām’s surviving abhangs number around 4600. Many later Hindu Sants and great poets have translated them into other languages because of their beauty.

Story: Sant Tukārām’s teaches that we should practice living as if it were the Last Day or our Life

“One day a devotee came to Sant Tukaram and asked him: “Maharaj, you are so open and free in life; you have no secrets. You never become angry with anyone, you are so cool, collected, and so together. How has that happened to you? Please tell me the secret of your life?”

Instead of answering his question, Tukaram said, “Look, I know a secret about you.”

The man did not know what to say. He asked, “Maharaj, what is that?”

Tukaram said, “You are going to die in seven days.”

As Tukaram was a great saint, the man could not disbelieve his words. He went back home and did all that had to be done in those seven days. He became wonderful with his wife and children because he had only seven days more to live, and he tried to be the very best that he could be. On the seventh day someone told Tukaram that the man was now going to die.

Tukaram went to see the man and asked, “Tell me what happened?”

The man said, “Maharaj, I am going to die now. Please bless me, pray for me.”

Tukaram said, “All right, but how have you lived for the past seven days? Were you angry with your wife, children, or with your friends?”

The man replied, “Maharaj, how could I get angry with anyone if I were to die after seven days?”

Tukaram said, “Now you know my secret of keeping my mind cool, calm, and collected all the time. I remember that particular relationships can end at any moment!”

This was the secret of Tukaram’s calm and peaceful mind. He knew that the next moment could be the last moment. He lived with an understanding and not with fear.”²⁶

²⁶ Swami Suddhananda, “Understanding Death,” pages 4-10 in *The Sages Speak About Life & Death*. 1995. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy (California)

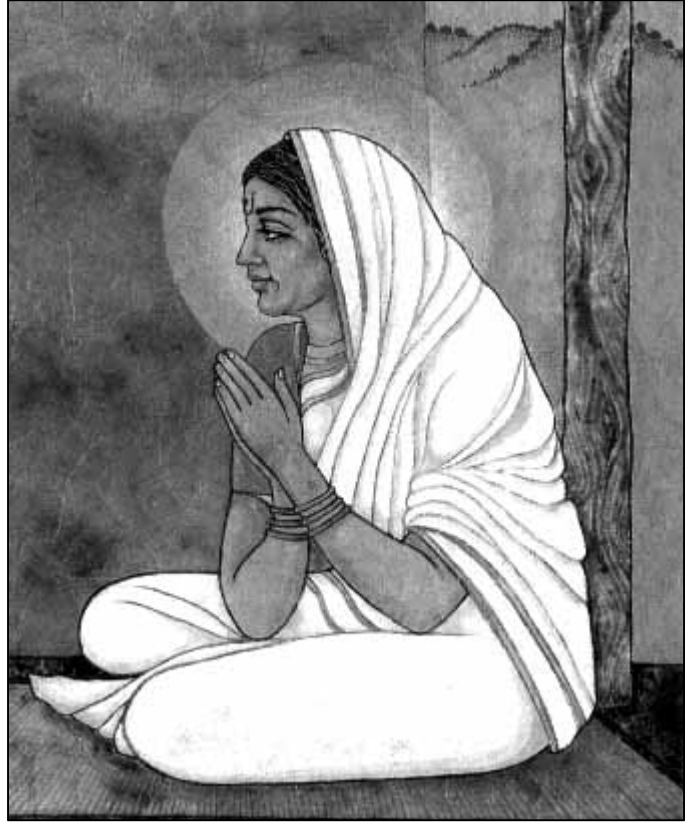
12.7 Bahinābāī

Bahinābāī was born in a Brahmana family in the year 1628 CE in Devagaon, a town located close to the famous Ellora Caves in the Indian state of Maharashtra. While she was still a little girl, she was married to a widower Gangadhara Pathak, who was more than 20 years older to her. Gangadhara was a fairly well-off man, a renowned astrologer and a scholar of the Vedas. But he had no faith in Bhagavān and was not at all religious.

On the contrary, Bahinābāī was a deeply spiritual person who liked to attend spiritual discourses given by visiting Sadhus in her village. In particular, she listened very intently to the kirtans conducted by a Pandit Jayarāma Gosāvī. Gangadhara did not like his wife attending these sermons. Therefore, he made her pregnant while she was still 11 years of age, so that she would stay at home.

However, her pregnancy did not deter her from attending the spiritual sermons. One day, when she was 3 months pregnant, Gangadhara was furious when she returned from Gosāvī's kirtan. In a fit of rage, he tied her in a bundle and threw her around. He did not care whether she or the unborn child would be killed. When people around heard the commotion, they rushed and called Jayarāma Gosāvī.

Jayarāma scolded Gangadhara and said, "You should consider yourself lucky that you have married a lady like Bahinābāī. She was a great Yogi in one of her previous lives, but due to some faults, she became a Yogabhrashta (a person who has temporarily fallen from the path of Yoga). In this life, she will complete her spiritual journey and unite with Bhagavān. You must not treat her harshly. Thank your good karma from previous lives that you have been given a chance to be associated with her now." A calf in their home was very devoted to Bahinābāī. When it saw the tortures inflicted on her, the calf stopped eating and died within a few days.



Gangadhara calmed down. But Bahinābāī became seriously ill. She fainted until she heard a Brahmana urging her to open her eyes. When she opened them, she had a darshana of Vithoba! Also, she felt an intense longing to meet with Sant Tukārām, who lived in the town of Dehu, and was a great Bhakta of Vithoba.

When Gangadhara heard of her dream and her desire to meet with Tukārām, he became furious once again. He insulted her for desiring to meet Tukārām, who was a Shudra whereas they were Brahmanas. He insulted the Sant and Vithoba and resolved to leave his wife. But the day before he was to leave her, he became seriously ill.

Gangadhara now regretted his actions of insulting a Sant like Tukārām. His sickness too had a drastic change on his behavior. As he got better, he started shedding his hatred for Sants and Bhagavān. Another Sadhu arrived at their home and advised him to recognize the spiritual greatness of his wife.

A few days later, he actually asked her to go with him to Dehu to have a meeting with Tukārām. There, he accepted the Sant as his Guru. Sant Tukārām also acknowledged the fact that Bahinābāī was spiritually very advanced from her previous births, and advised Gangadhara to ever treat her with love and respect.

Many years passed and Bahinābāī lived peacefully with her husband. They had several children together. She also met Sant Samartha Rāmadāsa, who gave her a Mūrti of Hanumān that is still worshipped by her descendants today.

At the age of 72 years, Bahinābāi was finally at her deathbed. She summoned her son, saying that she will attain Moksha in 5 days' time. She also said to him, "In my last twelve births, I have been striving to attain Moksha without success, but this time I will be united with Bhagavān. You have been associated with me in some way or the other in all of these 12 births. In the first three of these 12 births, I was born in the homes of Vaishya families. However, in all the cases, my family was advised not to marry me and let me be devoted to Bhagavān. I lived to the ages 13, 28 and 24 in these three lives. In the next four births, I was born in the families of milkmen. Again, I was very devoted to Bhagavān. In the last of these (viz. seventh lifetime), a Sadhu came to my family and declared that I was a Yogabhrashta – a person who was spiritually very advanced but not yet united with Bhagavān. As a result, my family asked the Sadhu to take me away. I advanced spiritually under the guidance of my Guru, and lived to the age of 63. In my lives 8-12, I was born in Brahmana families. In my 8th birth, I was married and also became a widow very early. But I too died at the age of 18. In my 9th birth, I lived only till the age of 9 years. In my 10th lifetime, I lived till the age of 42. And you, my son, were my eldest son in that life. In my 11th lifetime, I was married at the young age of 7 years. Fortunately, my husband was a yogi and he also became My Guru. I lived to the age of 43 years in that life. In my previous or the 12th life, I was born in the home of a very pious and religious couple. They married me to a man who was also very spiritual. Together, we advanced spiritually till I died at the age of 36. Now in this life, I have already seen how I will die. When my breath stops, my soul will depart and unite with Brahman – the Supreme Being. I will not be reborn thereafter. Just like the waters of a river merge with ocean, I will merge with Bhagavān. When the water puddle dries up, no one talks of reflection of a pot in it. Likewise, of what use is the body when my soul has united with Brahman? I am crossing this physical and material world, and will pass over into the infinite joy of Brahman!"²⁷

Regarding her life, a modern Sadhvi therefore aptly says, "From Bahinābāi's songs we can understand that her spiritual path was a mixture of devotion [Bhakti] and knowledge [Jnāna], and that she was highly learned in Advaita Vedanta... In those days a woman would not have any chance for education, so it seems probable that her learning came from both her spiritual experiences and from listening to discourses.... Though Bahinābāi had to suffer much at the hands of her husband, her firm faith and devotion, courage and steadfastness are certainly a great inspiration to women all over the world. She showed that a person can attain the highest even in the face of great afflictions."²⁸

12.8 Kūrmadāsa – the Physically Challenged Bhakta of Bhagavān

In the thirteenth century, in the city of Paithan on the river Godavari, lived a Brahmana named Kūrmadāsa. Unfortunately, he was born with a great physical handicap – he had no hands and feet. His arms and legs ended in just rounded stubs. Due to this, he could not walk, or do things that normal humans do with their hands. He lived entirely on the mercy of others. People called him 'Kūrma', which means a tortoise.

One day, he heard some Bhaktas sing bhajans for Bhagavān Vithobā, on their way to Pandharpur to visit His shrine. Vithobā is a form of Vishnu, and a famous temple is dedicated to him in Pandharpur. Kūrmadāsa was greatly moved by the bhajans and in his heart arose love for Bhagavān Vishnu. He begged the Bhaktas to take him to Pandharpur along with them. But they refused saying, "Pandharpur is a long way from here. You cannot walk and will slow us down."

Kūrmadāsa was disappointed. He decided to drag his body from Paithan to Pandharpur till he had a darshana of Bhagavān Vithoba. But on the first day, he could drag himself only 2 miles! That night, he took shelter in a Mandir on the way, and prayed to Vithoba, "Bhagavān, I know that I will take months to visit your Mandir. I do not have hands and therefore I cannot carry any food or water with me. I do not have any feet, and so I can only reach your Mandir after many months. But I have faith in you. I place



²⁷ Pravrajika Suddatmaprana, pp. 245-258

²⁸ Pravrajika Suddatmaprana, p. 257

myself in your hands. Please make sure that I reach your Mandir for your darshana, and do not give up on my way.” A few minutes later, a rich merchant appeared in front of Kūrmadāsa.

He said, “I heard that you are on your way to Pandharpur. I am also going that way. Why don’t we cover the journey together? My name is Vithoba.” Kūrmadāsa was surprised and said, “But I can travel only two miles every day. You can reach there much sooner if you do not travel with me. Moreover, I am dependent on others to give me food and water.”

The merchant smiled and said, “Do not worry. I have to stop every 2 miles on my way to sell my goods, meet other merchants and collect payments for goods sold. I needed a friend to reach my destination and you would be a perfect companion.” So, day after day, the merchant patiently covered a short distance of 2 miles with Kūrmadāsa. He took care to feed Kūrmadāsa lovingly and made sure that they both had a place to spend the night at the end of every day.

Four months passed this way. It was the month of Kārttik and the day of Ekādashī when a grand gathering of Vithobā’s devotees took place at Pandharpur. But, Kūrmadāsa and his merchant friend had reached only a place called Lāhul, which was 14 miles from Pandharpur. Now, Kūrmadāsa despaired and he cried out to Bhagavān, “Master, it will take me a week to reach Pandharpur, but your festival is today. I hope you will take pity on your Bhakta and fulfill my desire here in Lāhul.” The merchant Vithoba took leave of Kūrmadāsa to proceed to Pandharpur. Kūrmadāsa asked some other Bhaktas on way to Pandharpur to pass on the message to Bhagavān at the Mandir that His Bhakta was still 14 miles away from Him but wished to see Him.

Meanwhile, the great Sants Jnaneshvara and Namadeva had joined other Bhaktas in Pandharpur for the festival. Suddenly, Bhagavān Vithoba appeared in front of the two Sants and said, “My dear Bhakta Kūrmadāsa waits for me in Lāhul and I cannot let him down. Come, let the three of us walk to meet him!” The Sants followed Bhagavān and on their way, they met another Sant named Sāmavata, a gardener. The four of them then reached Kūrmadāsa in Lāhul.

When Bhagavān Vithoba appeared in front of Kūrmadāsa with the three Sants, Kūrmadāsa wept with joy. Bhagavān said to Kūrmadāsa, “I was the merchant who took care of you these last four months. I am very pleased with your Bhakti. I will offer you a boon.”

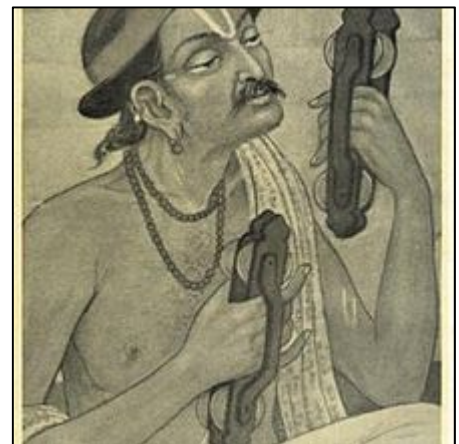
Kūrmadāsa could have asked Bhagavān Vishnu Vithoba to give him a perfect body. Instead, he prayed, “You have appeared in front of your humble Bhakta. What more could I have asked for. I only ask that you bless me, and that you should always stay here in Lāhul, so that disabled people like me who cannot travel to Pandharpur can have your darshana here itself.” Bhagavān Vithoba smiled, and converted Himself into a Mūrti there itself. A Mandir was constructed at Lāhul around the Mūrti. And even today, on their way to Pandharpur, the Bhaktas always stop at Lāhul to worship the gracious Lord of Kūrmadāsa!²⁹

Discussion: When Bhagavan wanted to grant him a wish, why do you think Kurmadasa did not ask Bhagavan to give him a perfect body? What did you learn from Kurmadasa?

12.9 Sant Narsi Mehtā

Narsi Mehta (born in 1414 CE), a great Sant, was born in Junāgadh in the Indian state of Gujarat. He lost both his parents at a very early age. Thereafter, his brother and sister-in-law raised him. His brother loved him dearly, but his sister-in-law was sometimes very harsh with him. She was tired of Narsi’s pranks. One day, Narsi had a fight with another boy, and tore his shirt, as well as injured him.

She got very angry with Narsi when she heard the complaint and beat him when he returned home. Narsi was terrified and he ran into a forest outside his town. In the forest, he took shelter in an abandoned Shiva Mandir. He was hungry, tired, alone and scared. He embraced the



²⁹ Pravrajika Suddhatmaprana, pp. 62-66

Shivalinga and started chanting the name of Shiva to overcome his fear. This went on for several days.

One night, while he was asleep, he was woken up by a sound. He was startled to see Bhagavān Shiva in front of him, Who blessed him also with a darshana of Krishna. Narsi was overjoyed to see Bhagavān Shiva and Krishna. The latter put a leaf from the Tulsi garland around his neck into Narsi's mouth. Immediately, Narsi acquired the gift of composing and chanting Bhajans.

A few days later, a family member came in search of him, and took him back home. Later in his life, Narsi married and continued to compose and sing Bhajans of Krishna. Very often, his Bhakti came in the way of a comfortable life, because Narsi was not very interested in earning money. Narsi and his wife were often dependent on his brother and sister-in-law, who continued to trouble Narsi in many ways. But he always treated her with a lot of respect and love, saying, "I am forever indebted to you. It is because of you that I had the darshana of Bhagavān."



Story: Narsi Mehta teaches a lesson to the Brahmanas

Narsi Mehta (15th cent. CE) was a Nāgara Brahmana of Gujarat and he defied caste taboos. He would go to the homes of untouchables and chant religious songs there. He would also accept invitations from them and eat with them. Incensed, his own community excommunicated him. Once, the Brahmanas were invited to a religious feast organized by high caste Hindu, but Narsi Mehta was excluded from the list of invitees.

When the Brahmanas started eating their food, they got a great shock. Each Brahmana saw an untouchable sitting on his either side. The Brahmanas realized that the purpose of this miracle was to show to them that Narsi Mehta was a true devotee of Brahman because he had realized that divinity abides within all humans. The Brahmanas repented for their own narrow mindedness. They re-admitted Narsi Mehta into their community and declared him to be a great devotee.

Sant Narsi Mehtā another claim to fame is that he wrote a bhajan that was a favorite of Mahatma Gandhi. Let us learn this Bhajan with its English translation.

‘Vaishnava Jana To’ Bhajan : A Favorite of Mahatma Gandhi

<i>Original Lyrics</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re Par Dukkhe Upkaar Kare Toye Man Abhiman Na Anne Re Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re	“Who can be called a true ‘Vaishnav?’? He can be called a true Vaishnav Who understands the pains, sorrows and miseries of others and experiences these as his own, Who helps to get rid of other’s miseries without any sense of egoism in his mind.
Sakal Lok Maan Sahune Vandhe, Ninda Na Kare Kainee Re Baach Kaachh, Man Nischal Raakhe, Dhan-Dhan Jananee Tainee Re Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re	Who respects each and everyone in this world without any prejudice and does not criticize or abuse anyone, Who is steadfast in thought, speech and action and who has complete control over all his senses. Glory be to the mother who has given to birth to such a pious soul!
Sam-Drishitine Trishna Tyaagi Par-Stree Jene Maat Re	Who regards all equally and has no anger or spite towards any, Who has no favorites,

<p>Jivha Thaki Asatya Na Bole Par-Dhan Nav Jhale Haath Re Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re</p> <p>Moha-Maaya Vyaape Nahi Jene Dridh Vairaagya Jena Man Maan Re Ram-Naam-Shoon Taali Laagi Sakal Tirath Tena Tan Ma Re Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re</p> <p>Van-Lobhi Ne Kapat Rahit Chhe Kaam-Krodh Nivaarya Re Bhane Narsaiyyo Tenu Darshan Karta Kul Ekoter Taarya Re...</p> <p>Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re Par Dukkhey Upkar Karey Toyey Man Abhiman Na Anne Re Vaishnav Jan To, Tene Kahiye Je Peed Paraaye Jaane Re</p>	<p>Who has given up all desires of this deceptive world, Who considers all the women except his own wife as 'mother'. Who never utters or thinks any false thought, Who never touches wealth got by any immoral or dishonest means,</p> <p>Who is not attracted by the glitter and glamour of the world, Who is a man of strong renunciation and remains thoroughly detached from this world. Who has wholeheartedly surrendered himself to God Rama. All the pilgrimages, holy places are centered in his body because he has become one with God.</p> <p>Who has no avarice, no roguery in his mind, Who has mastered passion and has controlled anger, Bhakta Narsi says: One who is lucky to have even a sight of such a real Vaishnav is not only blessed himself but his seventy one generations are blessed too!"³⁰</p> <p>"Who can be called a true 'Vaishnav?'" He can be called a true Vaishnav Who understands the pains, sorrows and miseries of others and experiences these as his own, Who helps to get rid of other's miseries without any sense of egoism in his mind.</p>
---	--

12.10 The Child Saint Ballāl of Pālī (Maharashtra)

There are 8 main temples of Ganesha, all of which are located in the state of Maharashtra in India. One of these temples is called the Ballāleshvara Temple, located in the village of Pālī. There is a very beautiful story behind this Mandir, showing how much Ganesha loves children who love Him.

In the village of Pallilpur, there lived a merchant named Kalyāṇa with his wife Indumati. They had a son Ballāla, who was very devoted to Ganesha from his childhood. All the other kids in his neighborhood were greatly impressed with Ballāla's love for Ganesha. Therefore, they too started worshipping Ganesha with Ballāla very regularly. They would collect small stones. They imagined these stones to be little Mūrtis of Ganesha. And then, they would all do a pūjā to these stones.



The parents of the children got very upset. They thought that all the kids were wasting time doing pūjā to Bhagavān when they should be studying and playing. They blamed Ballāla for all this. They went to Kalyāṇa and complained, "Your son is fooling our children. What do these kids know about how puja should be done? They should wait to grow up first, and start earning money. Then, they can do puja if they want to." Kalyāṇa scolded Ballāla, but Ballāla said, "I do not force any other kids to join me during the pūjā. They come on their own because we all love Ganesha."

One day, Ballāla and his friends all went to the forest to play. There, Ballāla found a large piece of rock that looked like Ganesha. Ballāla and his friends constructed a small hut over that rock. Then, they started doing a pūjā to

³⁰ Rama G Thakore, "Narsinh Bhagat," pp. 87-93 in Bhat et al (1977)

Ganesha. They sang songs to Him and offered him flowers. Several hours went by but the kids were so busy doing their puja that they forgot to go home. The parents got worried and they went to the home of Kalyāṇa to complain, “Look! Your son has again fooled our kids. If our kids get lost or hurt, we will hold you responsible.”

Kalyāṇa went looking for the kids and found them there doing their puja. He yelled at them and they all ran back to the village towards their home. Except Ballāla, who was so busy singing to Ganesha that he did not even realize that his father was yelling at him. Kalyāṇa was furious. He started hitting his son with a stick, and then tied him to a tree. Then, he broke that piece of rock that Ballāla was worshipping and said, “Let me see how your Ganesha helps you!”

Ballāla prayed to Ganesha to help him. Bhagavān Ganesha appeared immediately and freed Ballāla. He punished Kalyāṇa and said, “You have harmed my devotee. For this, you will suffer in this life and the next.” Then he said to Ballāla, “My child, I really liked you and your friends worshipping Me. I will henceforth live here so that you and others can do a puja to me anytime you want. Also, I will now be called as ‘Ballāleshvara’, which means ‘The Īshvara worshipped by Ballāla’. Also, I command that people will first worship the rock that you found, and then Me.”

Ganesha then turned into a large stone Mūrti. Today, that place has a Mandir called Ballāleshvara Temple at Pālī, and it is one of the eight temples of Bhagavān Ganesha. When we visit that Mandir, we first worship the rock that Ballāla found, and then the Mūrti of Ballāleshvara.

12.11 Jhulelāl, the Savior of Hindus in Sindh

In the late 10th century, Mirkhshah Badshah, the ruler of Thatta in coastal Sindh, tried to force Sindhi Hindus to convert to Islam unless they could ask the Hindu God they worshipped to produce a miracle. The Hindus asked for some time to decide and they offered worship to Lord Varuṇa on the banks of Indus for 40 days. On the 41st day, corresponding to the second day of the month of Chaitra, a divine boy was born to a Lohana caste couple named Mata Devaki and Rattanchand who lived in Nassarpur (also known as Nassarabad) in the district of Hyderabad adjacent to Thatta. It is said that when the baby boy was placed in a cradle (‘jhulā’), it started rocking (‘jhule’) on its own, like the waves of the Indus River, which is why the Saint got this name. The child began to mature at an extraordinary speed. The Hindus were convinced that their savior had come.

When the word reached Mirkhshah, he summoned Jhulelal to convert him to Islam but the latter tried to reason with the King that Hindus and Muslims worshipped the same Divine and therefore it was improper to force Hindus to forsake their faith. However, the fanatical courtiers of Mirakhshah goaded the king to arrest and kill Jhulelal whereupon the Saint miraculously created an inferno and a flood from the Indus River in the palace. The king was terrified and despite his courtiers’ argument that these were plain magical tricks, he begged Jhulelal for forgiveness and ordered that Hindus not be converted to Islam by force.





time in bhajans and prayers. This was called the Chaliho Sahib festival (chaliho = forty). Every morning, a sweet meat called 'akha' made of rice, ghee, flour and sugar was offered to the Deity Jhulelal. On the 41st day coinciding with Cheti Chand, a procession was taken out in the honor of Jhulelal. In the procession, the Baharana Sahib was taken at the head. Baharana Sahib consists of Jyot (sacred fire), Misiri (unrefined crystal sugar), Phota, fruits, and akha. Next to



Thereafter, Jhulelal travelled all over Sindh to establish Dharma. Many sites are associated with him, including the Zinda Pir in Sukkur, where he travelled on the Indus River against its flow. The story of Sant Jhulelal teaches us that everyone should be free to practice and believe in his or her religion. We must not force our religion on others. And when others try to force their religion on us, we must resist it.

Cheti Chand, celebrated on the 2nd day of the month of Hindu calendar month of Chaitra. The festival is celebrated in the memory of the great Sindhi Saint Jhulelal Sāin (also called Uderolal and Zindā Pīr) who is considered an incarnation of Lord Varuṇa, and is shown riding the Pari fish which swims upstream on the Indus. There are numerous temples for his worship in Sindh that are still being used. But, the fairs (melā) in the memory of Jhulelal are no longer held in his birthplace Nassarpur (dist. Hyderabad, Sindh in Pakistan) because most Hindus of that area have fled to India in recent times.

Sindhi Hindus in Pakistan used to observe a vow for 40 days preceding the festival, during which they resided along the banks of the Indus, ate simple vegan food, washed their own clothes with the water of the river and spent that time in bhajans and prayers. This was called the Chaliho Sahib festival (chaliho = forty). Every morning, a sweet meat called 'akha' made of rice, ghee, flour and sugar was offered to the Deity Jhulelal. On the 41st day coinciding with Cheti Chand, a procession was taken out in the honor of Jhulelal. In the procession, the Baharana Sahib was taken at the head. Baharana Sahib consists of Jyot (sacred fire), Misiri (unrefined crystal sugar), Phota, fruits, and akha. Next to that was and behind it was a Kalash (metal pitcher) and a Nariyal (coconut) in it, covered with cloth and flowers and a mango leaf. There was also Murti of Jhulelal Devata. Today, Sindhi Hindus in India and elsewhere still take out processions in the Sant's honor, with the Baharana Sahib at the front.

12.12 Bhakta Narahari Sonār who Saw Vishnu but touched Shiva

We should respect all Forms of Bhagavān. We should not make fun of someone else's Ishta Devata. Hindus who make fun other people's Ishta Devata or of their religion cannot be good Hindus. Let us now read the story of a man who loved Shiva but hated Vishnu. Let us see how Bhagavān Shiva taught him a very useful lesson about loving both Shiva and Vishnu.

The town of Pandharpur was famous for its temple of Vithoba, a form of Bhagavān Vishnu. In that town also lived a famous goldsmith named Narahari. He was a great bhakta of Shiva but he decided that he

will not worship any form of Bhagavān but Shiva.

Once, a rich merchant who had no son made a promise to Vishnu that if he became a father, he would give a gold waistband for Vithoba's Murti to thank Bhagavān. His prayers were answered. Soon, a boy was born to him and his wife. The merchant approached Narahari and requested him to take the waist measurement of the murti of Vithoba for making the gold waistband. But Narahari refused flatly even if that meant losing the business. So the merchant offered to measure it himself and bring the measurement to Narhari. He went to the temple, took the measurement and then gave it to Narahari. Unfortunately, when the gold waistband was put around the murti, it was found to be somewhat shorter than needed. The merchant took it back to Narahari and requested him to add one more section to make it a bit longer. But, this time the merchant discovered that the waistband was a little too long.

Annoyed, the merchant requested Narahari to go himself to the temple to take the measurement of the murti's waist. Narahari did not even want to see the murti of Vishnu Vithoba, but he agreed on the condition that he will be taken blind-folded to the temple. The merchant agreed to this condition. While Narahari was being taken to the Mandir with the blindfold, the pilgrims took pity on him for his foolishness for not seeing the beautiful murti. But Narahari would not change his mind.

There inside the temple, the blind-folded Narahari placed his tape-measure around the Murti of Vithoba. But instead of feeling the stone murti, he felt elephant skin, just like the skin that Shiva wears on His waist. Narahari was a little shocked. He put the tape-measure around the waist again. But once again, he felt a murti of Shiva with an elephant skin around it. Narahari was convinced that the foolish worshippers of Vithoba were actually worshipping a murti of Shiva.

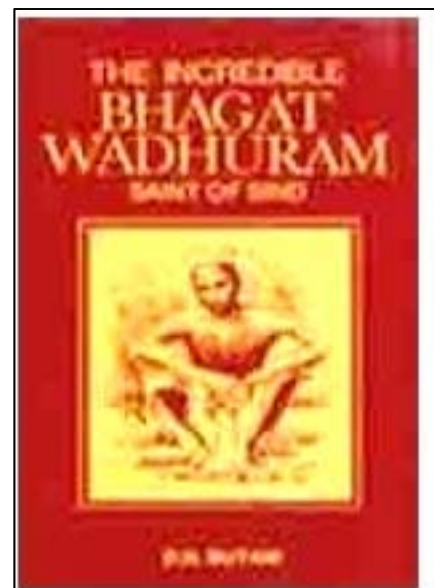
So he took off his blindfold. But now he got a bigger surprise. He saw that he was indeed looking at the murti of Vishnu Vithoba and there was no elephant skin around its waist. He tied the blindfold again around his head and started measuring the waist. But once again, he felt that he was touching the Murti of Shiva. Upon taking off the blind-fold, Narahari now saw again that it was actually Vithoba and not Shiva.

Narahari understood what Shiva was trying to teach to him – that Shiva and Vishnu are one and it was foolish on part of Narahari to assume that he could worship Shiva but totally ignore Vishnu, because They are one half of each other.

12.13 Sant Wadhuram Khilnani of Sindh

Sant Wadhuram Khilnani (1868 – 1929)³¹ lived in the town of Bhiria in the district of Nawabshah in Sindh (now in Pakistan). He lived a very simple life, fed stray animals every day, and was extremely regular in visiting Mandirs and religious sermons by visiting Hindu saints. Wadhuram's Guru was one Thakur Sahajram Somai. The Guru gave the following mantra to Wadhuram, "Speak the truth, always be firm on it and then you will realize the Divine."

Once, his Guru was involved in a dispute and the matters reached the court of law. To save his skin, Thakur Somai said to his disciple, "Wadhuram, you are renowned for your truthfulness. If you give testimony in my favor, just as a direct you, word for word, I will win the case."



³¹ Butani. D H. 1986. The Incredible Bhagat Wadhuram, Saint of Sind. Promilla & Co. Publishers (New Delhi), Pp. 9-10

Wadhuram knew that his Guru was at fault. But, Dharma also taught him to follow his Guru's command without raising a question. However, Wadhuram's loyalty to truth was greater than respect for his Guru. He replied, "Gurudev, I will say only that which is the truth, irrespective of the consequences."

Thakur Somai was livid with anger and he said, "You have disobeyed your Guru. Henceforth, you cannot enter my home." Wadhuram bowed humbly and left. But he got a niche constructed built near a well outside his Guru's home. Thereafter, Wadhuram continued to light a lamp in that niche to honor his Guru in that way.

Sant Wadhuram (1868 – 1929) was a humble grocer in the town of Bhiria in the Nawabshah district of Sindh. He had sacks of grains and other eatables in his shop, and a wooden measuring bowl to weigh out exact quantities of the foodstuff for his customers. He collected all the money received in a clay pot kept next to him. His business strategy was very clear and open. He told the customers, "I will sell 16 measures of the bowl for Re. one, and add one anna as profit. You can measure the sixteen measures yourself, and place one Rupee and one anna in my clay pot."³² Sometimes, the customers would ask, 'What if we cheat you and measure 17 or 18 wooden bowls but put only one Rupee in the pot?' Wadhuram would smile and say, "My Thakur (the name by which he called Bhagawan) is sitting next to me and He will take care of it."

One day, a dishonest customer paid Rs. 2 plus the anna for profit to Wadhuram but took 36 measures of grain while Wadhuram was looking away. But as soon as that customer reached home, he had a severe attack of colic which no medicine was able to cure. The customer felt very guilty and returned to the shop to confess his guilt and seek forgiveness. Wadhuram forgave him, and asked him to be honest in the future. The news of this incident spread like wild-fire and the townfolk started addressing Wadhuram as Bhagat (devotee) Wadhuram.

At another time, a customer came to buy *patashas*³³ and paid with two silver rupee coins. When he reached home, he discovered that the coins had accidentally fallen into the packet of the patashas, or in other words, he had not paid Wadhuram anything for the patashas. In those days, Rs. 2 was a large sum of money.

The customer gloated to his wife how he got the patashas for free. She asked him to be honest and return to Wadhuram's shop to pay the amount, but he would not listen. Soon thereafter, his eyesight began to fail. The customer took this as a punishment for cheating a saintly shopkeeper. He went to Wadhuram, confessed and apologized and paid the amount owed.

Wadhuram asked him to practice honesty and truth in the future but said, "Since the two coins fell into your bag of patashas, they added to their weight. Therefore, you got less patashas than you should have. Let me weigh out some more patashas equal in weight to the two silver Rupee coins so that I can give you what I owe to you now." Then, Wadhuram weighed the patashas, and gave them to the customer, who was astonished at the Bhagat's honesty and humility.

12.14 Dāmājī Pant

Several hundred years back, in the kingdom of Bidar, ruled by a Muslim Sultan, there was a pious man name Damaji Pant. He was a great Bhakta of Bhagavān Vithhala, a form of Vishnu, worshipped in the town of Pandharpur. The Sultan had appointed Damaji as a revenue collector in the town of Mangalwedha and its surrounding regions.

³² In those days, Re. 1 had 16 annas and each anna had 64 paise. So a Rupee had 64 paise. The 16 annas represented the 16 Kalas (aspects) of Bhagawan, and 64 paise stood for the 64 kalās or secular arts and skills cultivated by the traditional Hindu society.

³³ A sweet made white rice flour mixed with sugar, cut in the form of circular discs.

One year, a terrible famine broke out in that area. Seeing many people starving, Damaji soon distributed his entire personal store of food to the poor. But that was not enough, and therefore, Damaji opened the royal granary in the town and asked the poor to take food from there. A jealous assistant tax collector who worked under Damaji



thought that this was a good opportunity to please the Sultan. He wrote a letter to the Sultan notifying him that Damaji had distributed the royal storehouse of food to the starving poor without charging any money. This had resulted in a lot of loss to the Sultan.

The Sultan was furious. He asked his soldiers to go and arrest Damaji and haul him to the royal court. As Damaji was being hauled towards Bidar, he begged the soldiers to let him stop enroute to pay his respects to Bhagavan Vitthala at Pandharpur. The soldiers agreed. There in the Mandir, Damaji prayed, “Hari Vitthala, today may be the last time I have come for your Darshana. I am going to see the Sultan who is very angry that I distributed his granary to the poor and starving. I am requesting you to bless me. My life is now in your hands.” Saying this, he asked the soldiers to take him to the Sultan.

Meanwhile, Bhagavān Vitthala took the form of a Mahār, an untouchable, and rushed to the court of the Sultan before Damaji Pant and the soldiers arrived. There, he produced a letter in the handwriting of Damaji and said to the Sultan, “Your majesty, I am Vitthonaik, the servant of Damaji. He has actually sold the grain at a great profit. This letter confirms this fact. Damaji has asked me to give you this bag of gold coins that he earned from the sale of the grain to starving people.” When the Sultan saw the large number of gold coins, he felt guilty that he had suspected an honest revenue officer.

Vitthonaik left. When Damaji arrived at Bidar, the Sultan thanked him for selling the grains at a huge profit. Damaji was surprised, “But I truly gave it away for free.” The Sultan responded, “Then where did your servant Vitthonaik get these gold coins from? And did you not write this letter that you sent it through him to me?” When Damaji saw the letter and the gold coins, his eyes were filled with tears, and he said, “Your Majesty, it was none other than Bhagavan Vishnu who came disguised as an untouchable to save my life!

The Sultan was astonished at hearing Damaji’s story. Damaji now requested, “I request your permission to retire. I want to spend the rest of my life serving Bhagavan Vitthala and sing Bhajans in his honor.” The Sultan granted his request. Damaji now lived the remaining years of his life in Pandharpur, composing and singing Abhangs – Marathi Bhajans in praise of Vitthala.

13. Saints of Eastern India & Bangladesh

13.1 Jayadeva and Padmāvatī:

One of the greatest Saint poets of Hindu Dharma is Jayadeva. He was born to very religious parents in the village of Kenduli Sasan in Odisha. This village is very close to the town of Puri which has the famous Jagannātha



Mandir. Jayadeva was a very young when his parents died. Jayadeva's father owed a little amount of money to a man named Niranjana. Now, Niranjana had no pity on the fact that Jayadeva was just a young boy with no one to support him. He decided to cheat Jayadeva and snatch his home from him as well! He created some fake papers about the money owed by Jayadeva's father, and took them to Jayadeva saying, "Look at these papers Jayadeva. They clearly say that if the loan is not repaid to me, I can take your home."

Jayadeva was a very innocent man, and he quietly signed his papers. Just then, Niranjana's daughter came running to them and said, "Father, our house has caught fire. Please hurry back." Although Niranjana had been extremely cruel to him, Jayadeva rushed to Niranjana's home to extinguish the fire. He walked with some water inside the burning house. A miracle then occurred – as soon as Jayadeva entered the house, the fire extinguished on its own. Niranjana realized that Jayadeva was a Saint, and he confessed that he had brought fake papers to snatch his home from him.

But, being a kind man, Jayadeva forgave him immediately.

Jayadeva wanted to be closer to the Jagannatha Mandir and therefore moved to Puri. He studied Sanskrit and soon became a fine scholar. Sudeva, a learned Pandit of that area, married his beautiful and noble daughter Padmāvatī to Jayadeva. The married couple returned to Jayadeva's village. After sometime, Jayadeva decided to go on a pilgrimage. He was already quite famous for his beautiful Sanskrit songs on Krishna and Radha. A king insisted on giving money to Jayadeva while he travelled for his pilgrimage.

On his way, a group of dacoits robbed Jayadeva. But even worse, they cut his hands and feet and threw him into a dry well. Although Jayadeva was bleeding and was in great pain, he remembered Krishna and kept chanting Bhagavān's name. Soon thereafter, the King of Bengal named Lakshman Sena was passing by with his soldiers and servants. When they saw Jayadeva chanting the names of Bhagavān even though he was bleeding to death, they pulled him out. Many physicians attended to Jayadeva and he survived. Lakshmana Sena was deeply impressed by Jayadeva's character and his bhakti for Krishna. He invited Jayadeva to spend a few days in his palace. There, the king arranged a feast for scholars of his kingdom.

The dacoits heard of the feast. They dressed themselves as noble Pandits and showed up to eat free food and get presents from the king. When they saw Jayadeva, they were shocked. They thought that Jayadeva would get them arrested. Jayadeva saw them too, but he did not believe in revenge. Instead, he asked the king to give some gifts to them. Some soldiers asked the dacoits, "How do you know Jayadeva, who is a very saintly person and is greatly respected by our king?" The dacoits lied and said, "Jayadeva is a crook who merely pretends to be a Saint. He had committed a great crime for which he should have been beheaded. Instead, we had only his hands and feet cut."

But, the moment the dacoits had completed their false story, the ground under them split open. As everyone



saw in shock, the dacoits were swallowed alive by the earth. And the very next moment, another miracle happened. Jayadeva's hands and feet grew back, and he was perfectly healed now! The king bowed to Jayadeva and requested him to explain the miracle. Jayadeva told him how the dacoits had robbed him and had cut his hands and feet. But, Jayadeva said, he was sorry that the dacoits had lost their lives because of him. In fact, he was grateful to the dacoits because they had shown to him how evil money was because it causes people to be greedy and cruel towards each other.

Jayadeva spent some time with the king of Odisha too and finally settled down in his home village. There, with Padmāvatī's help, he started writing his masterpiece – the Gīta Govinda. The picture on the left shows a scene from this beautiful poem. In this poetical

work, he describes very beautifully the love that Krishna had for Radha. One day, he was about to complete the verse with the words, '....Krishna touched Radha's feet,' but he stopped before he was about to write them. He thought, "How can Bhagavān touch anyone's feet?" He went to his wife and said, "I am confused about my poetry. Let me go and bathe in the river and return. I think a cool dip will clear my mind." Saying this, he left.

Padmāvatī was surprised to see Jayadeva return in a second. Jayadeva said, I think it is alright to complete the verse with the words '....Krishna touched Radha's feet.' He took out the palm leaf on which he was writing the poem, and then completed the verse. Then, his wife fed him lunch, and then he went inside to take an afternoon nap. After sometime, Padmāvatī heard a knock at the door. She was surprised to see Jayadeva standing. She asked, "When did you step out? I thought you were taking a nap." He was surprised and replied, "Of course not. I left an hour back to take a cool dip and am just now returning." Padmāvatī then brought back the palm leaf on which the verse was written complete. She went into the bedroom and saw that her husband, whom she had thought was sleeping there, was in fact not there at all.



The couple now understood what had happened. While Jayadeva went out for a dip in the river, none other than Krishna came to complete the verse, had food from Padmāvatī's hands, pretended to take a nap in the bedroom and then disappeared. Jayadeva now touched the feet of his wife and said, "Padmāvatī, you are my Guru. Krishna chose to give his darshana to you, instead of to me. By completing this verse in your presence, he taught me that there is no shame in touching the feet of someone you love deeply, no matter how great he is." The couple spent the rest of their lives in Kenduli and in Vrindavan, singing the praises of Krishna.

Did you know?

Jayadeva's Gīta Govinda became a very famous work. Even today, it is chanted daily at the Jagannatha Mandir in Puri. All over South India, many temples use its verses in their worship. And a couple of Jayadeva's verses were included in their scripture even by the Sikh Gurus, who lived more than 1000 miles away in Northwest India.

There is a village named Kenduli in three of India's states. All three villages claim to be the birthplace of Jayadeva. However, recent research has proven that it is the Kenduli Sasan village in Odisha which is the true birthplace of Jayadeva.

13.2 Shri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is regarded as an Avatara of Krishna in Kaliyuga by his followers. He was born in the village of Mayapur in the district of Nadia (today in the Indian state of Paschim Banga or West Bengal). He lived in the 15th-16th cent., mainly in eastern India (states of Paschim Banga and Orissa) and also toured northern and southern parts of India extensively. He inspired many Hindus to become Bhaktas of Krishna at a time when the Muslim rulers were often very cruel towards us. Inspired by him, a group of six scholars known as the six Goswamis settled in Vrindavan, where Krishna spent his childhood. Partly due to their efforts, Vrindavan is a great center of pilgrimage for Hindus even today. A group of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's devotees founded an organization named the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), popularly known as the Hare Krishnas, which continues to spread his message, as well as the message of the Bhagavad Gita all over the world. Below are some inspiring stories from the lives of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his disciples.

Rediscovery of Vrindāvan

The glories of Vrindavan were forgotten as a result of several centuries of Islamic rule. This sacred region lay between Delhi and Agra, two seats of Muslim political power in North India. The Sultans utterly destroyed the region, and let it become a desolate forest of scrub and thorny thickets. They even used the region as a hunting ground, killing of animals there being the ultimate sacrilege of the sensibilities of Vaishnavite Hindus.

But, a great saint arose in Bengal, named Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. When he visited the desolate region, he was able to see with his spiritual eyes the former associations of different spots with Bhagavān Krishna. Back in East India, he blessed Sri Rupa Goswami and Sri Sanatana Goswami and tasked them with going north to Vrindavana, and revive its former spiritual glory.

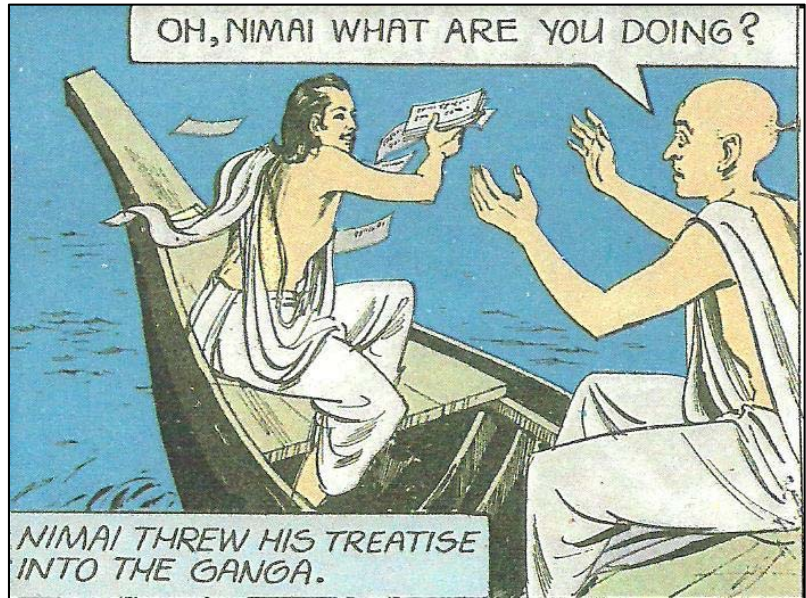


Blessed by the Chaitanya, the two saints spent several decades in that area, devotedly and persistently unearthing numerous sacred sites associated with the early life of Krishna. Times turned favorable for Hindus during the reign of two Mughal Emperors – Akbar and his son Jehangir who ruled together from 1556 – 1628 CE. In those roughly 75 years, the followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu attracted several Hindu princes and traders who sponsored the construction of beautiful temples to Krishna in that region. Although many of these temples were raised just two generations later by the bigoted Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb, the grandson of Jehangir, the glory of Vrindavan could not be completely extinguished this time.

Everything for the sake of pleasing Bhagavān

Raghunath Pandit was one of the greatest scholars of his times, and lived in 15th – 16th cent. Bengal. One day, he was crossing the river in a boat with his dear friend, the saintly Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The Pandit said, “I have written a scholarly book on Nyaya (Philosophy of Hindu logic).” Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said, “What a coincidence! I too have written a book on the same topic and am carrying its manuscript with me right now. Let me read out a few passages to you.”

As Mahaprabhu did so, he noticed that Raghunath Pandit shed a tear from his eye. “Why are you crying my friend” he asked. The Pandit said, “I had thought that my book will make me famous. But I realized that your book is superior to mine. Now no one will be interested in what I wrote.



Suddenly, Chaitanya threw his own book into the river. He smiled and said to Raghunath Pandit, “I write these things only for the pleasure of Krishna. I have no desire to acquire wealth and fame, much less by undermining my own friend.”

Story: Live the Scripture, not just Study it: Studying the Bhagavad Gita is not an end in itself. Once, a man came to Swami Chinmayananda and said, “I have gone through the Gita fifteen times.” Swami-ji asked, “*But has the Gita gone through you even once?*” The story below illustrates this message very aptly-

“While touring South India, Chaitanya encountered a certain Brahmin in the temple of Ranga-kshetra. This man daily sat in the temple turning over the pages of the Bhagavad-gita, but his constant mispronunciation of the Sanskrit made him the object of general mirth and derision. Chaitanya, however, observed signs of genuine spiritual ecstasy on the brahmin’s body, and he asked him what he read in the Gita to induce such ecstasy. The brahmin replied that he didn’t read anything. He was illiterate and could not understand Sanskrit. Nevertheless, his guru had ordered him to read the Gita daily, and he complied as best he could. He simply pictured Krishna and Arjuna together on the chariot, and this image of Krishna’s merciful dealings with his devotee caused this ecstasy. Chaitanya embraced the Brahmin and declared that he was an “authority on reading the Bhagavad-gita.”³⁴

Another time, during his South India tour, a group of young boys got very attracted to Chaitanya’s chanting of Krishna’s names. They started following him, chanting ‘Hari, Hari.’ When the father of one of the boys saw this, he was very angry. He started beating Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and said, “You are mad man, and you are now trying to make madmen out of these kids too.” Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said, “You may beat me as much as you want. But please do not stop these little children from chanting the names of Krishna.”



³⁴ Rosen, Steven. 1988. *The Life and Times of Lord Chaitanya*. Folk Books: Brooklyn (New York). pp. 163-164



The True Bhakta

One day, it was the time of the Ārati in the Jagannatha Temple. A huge crowd of Bhaktas stood in the Mandir and outside it, singing the Ārati with devotion, waving lamps and throwing flowers at the Mūrti. A woman devotee came late and was not able to make her way through the crowd to get a darshana of Bhagavān Jagannatha. She climbed the Garuda-Stambha³⁵ and started chanting the Ārati with great devotion. She was so lost in singing the devotional songs, that she did not realize that she had put her other foot on the shoulder of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who was also standing next to the pillar and singing the Ārati.

The saint stood still so that the lady does not get disturbed. But his student Govind got very upset at what he regarded as an insult to his Guru. He said to the lady, “Aren’t you ashamed at having put your feet on the shoulder of a Saint?” When the lady realized this, she immediately came down the pillar and fell at the feet of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, asking for forgiveness with tears in her eyes.”

But the saint replied, “Do not fall at my feet lady. I am the one who should fall at your feet. One should learn true devotion, faith and dedication from you. In your eagerness to worship Bhagavān, you did not even realize what else was around you because your entire attention was focused on Bhagavān. Indeed, this is how a true Bhakta is – his or her entire focus is on Bhagavān and not on anything else. I hope that one day even I will be able to focus all of my attention towards Bhagavān just like you.”

13.3 Haridās Thākur, the Muslim who would not give up his faith in Krishna

One of the most prominent disciples of Chaitanya was Haridās Thakur, who was born to Muslim parents in Budan, Jessore District (now in Bangladesh) in the year 1464 CE. His original Muslim name is not known or remembered. In the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, he is considered a dual incarnation of Bhagavān Brahmā and Bhakta Prahlāda. His father, Malai Kazi, was a Muslim magistrate – a high position in the Muslim Sultanate of Bengal. However, at a very young age, Haridās was influenced to become a devotee of Krishna by Adwaita Acharya.

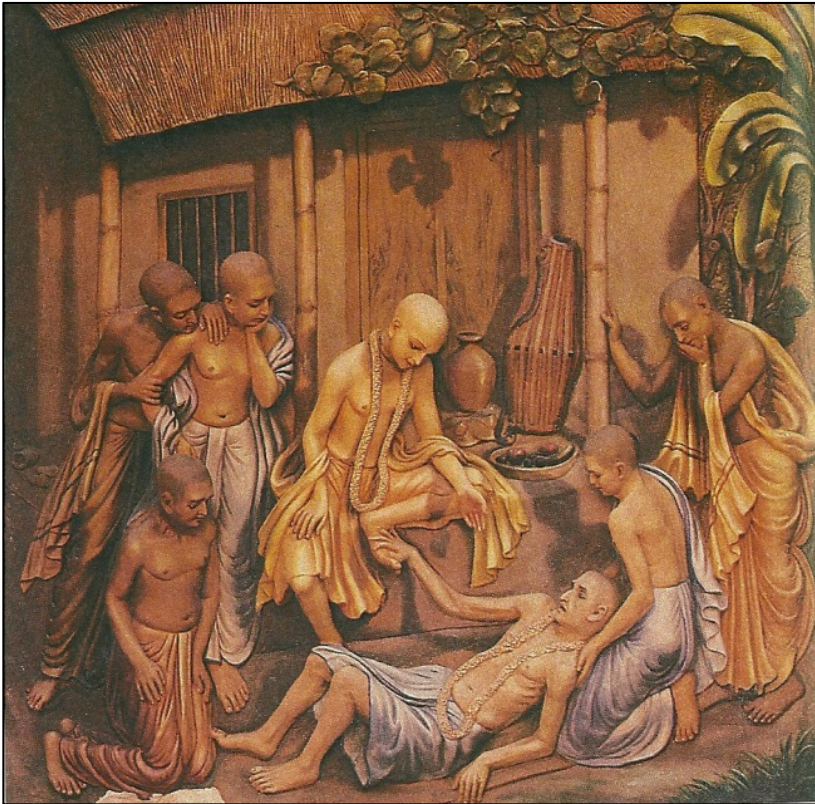
Initially, some conservative Hindus opposed his induction into the Hindu Vaishnava community, but his piety won over most of them in the course of time. It is said that he would chant the name of Krishna 300,000 times every day. Impressed with his devotion, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, whom Haridās accepted as his Guru, bestowed upon him the title ‘Nāmāchārya’ and



³⁵ Opposite to and in front of the Mūrti of Bhagavān Vishnu in the Mandirs, there is always a pillar with Garuda on its top.

deputed him to lead groups of chanters in Navadvēp. Bengal in those times was ruled by a Muslim Sultan Hussain Shah. He was comfortable with servile Hindus serving in his administration, but would not tolerate public displays of Hinduism, even though Hindus formed a majority of his kingdom's population.

Alarmed at the public chanting of Krishna's names by masses, he perceived Haridas Thakur as a threat. Moreover, the fact that Haridas had committed apostasy from Islam was unacceptable. Hindus were imprisoned in large numbers to curb the revival of their faith. The Muslim governor of Bengal also got Haridas Thakur imprisoned. But taking this as an opportunity, Haridas started preaching the Vaishnava faith to the prisoners in the jails and declared that there was no difference between Hindu Dharma and Islam. This was intolerable to fanatical Muslims, who viewed their faith as superior to all the others. As a result of his actions, a harsh sentence was pronounced on him by Gorai, the local Muslim magistrate – he was ordered to be whipped at the market places of the city of Phulia.



Haridas was dragged and whipped from one place to another, Haridas did not resist nor did he cease chanting the holy names of Krishna. At the 22nd marketplace, he was taken to be dead and thrown into the river. Miraculously, his body was washed ashore, and he was revived.

Soon thereafter, he followed Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to Puri, which was ruled by the Hindu king Pratāparudra. Unfortunately, despite his sacrifices for the sake of his adopted Hindu faith, he was not allowed into the Jagannātha temple because he was born of Muslim parents. Chaitanya Mahāprabhu got a cottage constructed for Haridas Thakur in a garden from where he could see the Chakra (Discus of Lord Vishnu) on the spire of the temple. He asked Haridas to worship the Chakra from his cottage every day and assured him that he will get the same spiritual benefit that he would have got by seeing the Mūrti itself.

Mahāprabhu also arranged for Prasāda (sanctified food) to be sent from the temple to Haridas every day.

When it was time for Haridas to leave his mortal body, he requested Chaitanya Mahāprabhu to place his foot on his chest to bless Haridas. Chaitanya Mahāprabhu complied, and thereafter, conducted the funeral of Haridas with his own hand on the coast of Puri. The Samādhi of Haridas Thakur exists there even today.

13.4 Shri Jīva Goswami³⁶ learns the virtue of Forbearance

Once, a scholarly Pandit who was a great debater arrived at Vrindavana. The locals told him about Sri Sanātana Goswami (1488 – 1558 CE), a great saint, and a great scholar of that holy town. The Pandit approached Sri Sanātana and challenged him to a debate, "Either you defeat me in a debate on the scriptures, or you should write a declaration that I am a greater scholar than you."

Sri Sanātana Goswami was always immersed in the devotion of Krishna. Although he could have defeated the Pandit easily, he did not want to puncture the Pandit's enthusiasm and self-respect. And so, he wrote the declaration that the Pandit was a greater scholar, and handed the same to him."

³⁶ He and Santana Goswami were two of the Six Goswamis, or main disciples of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu that settled down in Vrindavan.

The Pandit was overjoyed. He went all over the town, accompanied by musicians who chanted the praises of his scholarship. Suddenly, Sri Jiva Goswami, the nephew of Sri Sanatana, and a saint and a scholar in his own right, heard about the Pandit having defeated his uncle. He approached the Pandit and challenged him to a debate. The Pandit lost. Still angry at him for having coerced his uncle to write the declaration, Jiva Goswami snatched all the declarations of victory that the Pandit used to carry with him, and forced him to write a new one saying he was inferior in his learning to Jiva Goswami.

When this news reached Sri Sanatana Goswami, he was very upset with his nephew and said, “Tell Jiva that I do not want to see his face again. He has destroyed the enthusiasm for learning, and the self-respect of a Pandit. I have no use of the pride of learning, but for some people, that is a good driving force to make them study and learn continuously. Therefore, what he did to that Pandit was not right.” Sri Jiva Goswami was very repentant at what he had done. And it was only after several penances and pleadings that Sri Sanatana eventually forgave his nephew and met him.

This beautiful story demonstrates that in this world, there are people at different levels of spiritual attainment. Some of those who are at lower levels, become proud of small accomplishments, just as little kids feel pride in being able to read their first sentences, or when they are praised by their teacher. But this does not mean that we should stoop to the level of these people and become like them. And even more important, we should not look down upon them or humiliate them, because at their stage of understanding, pride and rewards are indeed big motivators to keep them going on the path of spiritual enlightenment. They who are at higher levels should constantly encourage those who are below them, with love, compassion and understanding, rather than ‘show them their place.’ Only a heartless adult will humiliate little children who are still learning the alphabet by showing off his own learning in front of them.



13.5 Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda (1896 – 1977 CE)

In recent times, the one person who has done the most in taking the message of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu and of Hindu Dharma in general to various parts of the world is Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda. He was born in 1896 to a very religious father, who taught him the art of singing bhajans, leading satsangs and also introduced him to his Guru Bhaktisiddhānta Saraswati Thakur. Swami Prabhupāda’s childhood name was Abhay Charan De. His Guru was very impressed with Abhay’s dedication to Krishna, and skills in the English language and often told him, “If you ever have money, use it for publishing books in English for spreading the message of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu all over the world.”

However, Abhay married, and lived with his wife and children till the age of 54. He ran a business and worked several jobs for over 30 years to support his family. Whenever he got time, he would invite other devotees of Krishna for spiritual discussions and bhajans. But his wife never participated and preferred to sip tea in another room. Under her influence, his children too did not get very interested in their father’s activities. One day, at the age of 54, Abhay



returned home to find that his wife had sold his holy book, a copy of Shrimad Bhāgvatam, to buy herself a packet of tea biscuits. He was very disappointed and thought, “I have tried for 32 years to make her a Bhakta of Krishna. I have fulfilled my duties as a father and a husband. But now, I will spend the rest of my life for the sake of Krishna.”

He left his home, and in 1959, he became a Sannyāsī and was given a new name – Abhay Charan Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda. He had no place to live, and no source of income. He begged for food and depended on the generosity of others to live in Delhi and Vrindāvan. Remembering his Guru’s words, he started



writing in English, and completed the first three large sized volumes containing the translation and explanation of the Shrimad Bhāgvatam.

In 1965, when he was already 69 years, he boarded a ship and traveled to New York. At that time, he had no followers, no money and had no idea what exactly he could do to spread the message of our Dharma in the west. It was the first time he had stepped out of India.

He was hosted by a gentleman Gopal Agarwal of Philadelphia for around two months. With his assistance, he traveled back to New York and other places of the United States. Soon, he founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. His followers began to grow, and they attracted a lot of attention by chanting Krishna bhajans at public places and distributing their literature. Soon, many other branches at San Francisco and other cities opened as well. In the next 12 years since his first journey outside of India, his American followers opened branches in many other countries.

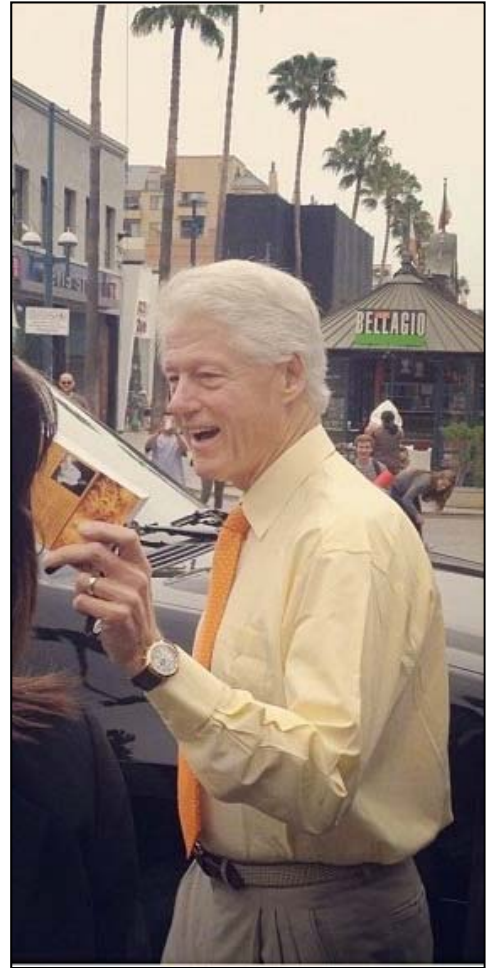
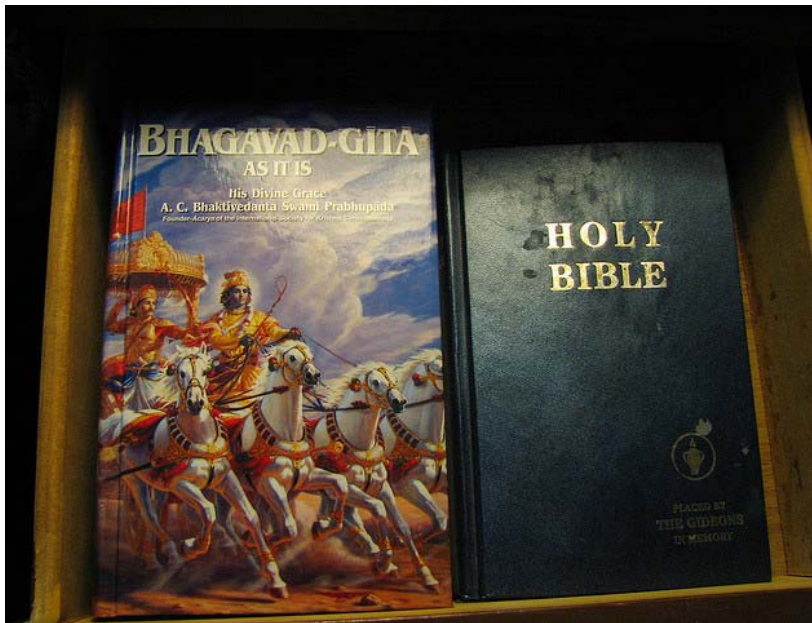
He himself travelled 14 times across the globe giving lectures, leading public chanting, opening temples, distributing copies of the Gita and other books on Hindu Dharma. Today, ISKCON centers are found all over the world, although the movement had started just a few decades ago. Thousands of non-Hindus and even Hindus have become members of ISKCON since then. They are popularly known as ‘Hare Krishnas.’ In 1977, Swami Prabhupāda passed away at Vrindāvan at the age of 81. It is amazing how a 69 year old man could accomplish so much for Hindu Dharma at an age when most of us retire and spend our life in leisurely pursuits.

The Hare Krishnas are a very visible group in virtually all countries in the world due to their distinct Vaishnava robes, music, chanting and singing that they exhibit in the streets. The Hare Krishnas utilize all modern means of spreading their beliefs- printing books, internet resources, distribution of pamphlets and so on. The extensive publishing apparatus of this sect is now said to be the largest producer of the Hindu texts like Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana in the whole world. An illustrated English translation of the Hindu Epic Mahabharata is also under preparation.

The Hare Krishnas have also established semi-monastic live-in communities all over the world. Members of these communities spend their time in the Vaishnava devotional practices like kirtana, bhajan, japa and so on. ISKCON actively propagates the cause of vegetarianism and is spending large sums of money in the reconstruction of Vaishnavite centers of worship in India that were desecrated during the Islamic rule (like Navadvipa in Bengal, Vrindaban in Europe).

Did you Know? Project “The Gita in every Motel Room”

- The largest distributors of the Gita are the Geeta Press (Gorakhpur, India) and International Society for Krishna Consciousness ISKCON). The photo on the right shows President Bill Clinton of the United States receiving a copy of the Gita from a devotee of ISKCON.
- ISKCON has placed thousands of Gitas in hotel rooms alongside the existing Bibles in the USA. Individuals can also sponsor Gitas for owners of willing hotel owners.



13.6 Shri Shankar Dev

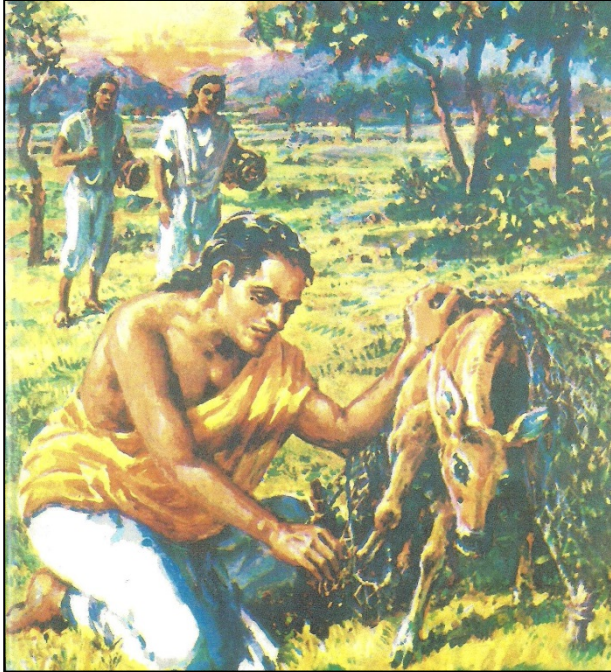
Shri Shankar Dev was a great Vaishnava Hindu saint who spread the teachings of the Shrimad Bhagavat Purana, and the worship of Vishnu in Assam and in other parts of northeastern India. Below are a few stories from the life of Shankar Dev and his student Madhav Dev that shows their greatness.

Story: Sant Shankar Dev's Compassion

Tulsiram, a distant relative of Saint Shankaradeva, got afflicted with leprosy. Many forms of the disease are contagious and there was no cure for it in those days. Lepers were shunned by everyone and kept away from the villages. No one wanted Tulsiram close to them. Shankaradeva took pity on Tulsiram. He got a house constructed for Tulsiram at a convenient location where he could get water easily. Shankaradeva asked Tulsiram to plant 100 Tulsi (ocinum sanctum) bushes around his house (because Tulsi can cure leprosy) and pray to Krishna day and night. He also made sure that Tulsiram got a steady and constant supply of food from charitable passers-by. In the course of time, Tulsiram got cured of his disease and was completely healed. He



became a disciple of Shankaradeva.



Once, Shankardev was passing through a forest with his students while on a pilgrimage. He saw a deer ensnared in a hunter's net. Very soon, the hunter would have returned and taken the deer for slaughter.

Shankardev took pity on the creature and freed it from the net. But, he was worried that he had deprived the hunter of his livelihood. Therefore, he placed a gold coin in the net out of compassion to compensate the hunter for his loss.

Story: Sant Shankardev and the Pure Fisherwoman Rādhikā

The Tembuwani river in Assam is a tributary of the mighty Brahmaputra. In the rainy season, the Brahmaputra caused a great backflow of water into the Tembuwani river. As a result, the people living on the banks of the Tembuwani river had to suffer a lot. The swollen river washed away their homes, crops and the soil in the fields.

The villages approached Shankaradeva and sought his help. The Saint decreed that if a chaste woman were to pour some water into the stream with a vessel that had holes all over it, the river would subside permanently. The wives of Brahmanas, Kayasthas and all other upper caste men were approached with a request to do so, but they obviously declined. "How could water stay in a vessel with holes in it," they said?

The villagers went in a large group to Shankaradeva to convey the bad news that no high born lady was willing to take up the challenge. At the same time, a fisherman named Purnanda and his wife Radhika were going down the Tembuwani river on a boat. Seeing the crowd, they too approached the Saint. When Radhika heard the cause of the meeting, she promptly offered to help out. Everyone including her husband was aghast at her audacity. How could a humble fisherwoman do what the high born ladies could not? But Shankaradeva intervened and asked the fisherwoman to observe a fast in honor of God and come to the site the following day, carrying water in the perforated vessel.

The next day, the lady did as she was told. Everyone was stunned to see that the humble but pious fisherwoman, with the blessings of the Saint and Bhagavān was able to carry water in the perforated container without losing it. As soon as she poured it into the Tembuwani river, the waters of the river immediately came to a standstill. This miracle allowed the villagers to construct a dam to divert its flow and prevent flooding in future.

Through this miracle, Radhika and Shankaradeva showed that being born in a high caste does not make one superior, and members of the so called low caste can also be more pious and accomplished than the former. Fishing was considered an unclean profession in India at that time, and fishermen and fisherwomen were therefore considered dirty person. But Sant Shankaradeva recognized the fact that it was the purity of Radhika's mind that made her suitable for doing a task that no one else could have done.

A Muslim Tailor sees Bhagavān Vishnu in a Hindu Saint

Many people believed that Sant Shankaradeva was an incarnation of the four armed Bhagavān. King Nara Narayana of the kingdom of Kuch Behar in upper Bengal and lower Assam (in eastern India) had become a disciple of Shankaradeva. He wanted to gift a coat to Shankaradeva and deputed his royal tailor Chand Sai to make one.

Now Chand Sai, a Muslim was a very arrogant man. He had openly abused Shankaradeva and his disciples several times in the past. Yet, Chand Sai had the skill of measuring the dimensions of a person's physique for stitch his garments merely by looking at that person. So, following the royal orders, he went to see the Saint grudgingly.

When he stood in front of Shankaradeva, he kept looking at him for a long time. Chand Sai did not say anything, and after staring at the saint for a long time, he left. A few days later, he delivered a coat with four arms! When asked for the reason for this ridiculous design, Chand Sai submitted that he saw the four armed Vishnu in Saint Shankaradeva. He begged the Sant to forgive his past transgressions against him and his devotees. He also requested Shankaradeva to initiate him into Vaishnavism and teach him his 'Eka Sharan Naam Dharma' philosophy in which the devotee chanted the holy names of Vishnu for his spiritual progress.

Shankaradeva initiated Chand Sai to Vaishnava Hinduism. But he also asked Chand Sai to cut off the two extra arms to make it suitable for his mortal human body that had only two arms. Soon thereafter, Chand Sai became one of the prominent disciples of the great Sant. Due to his good karma from previous lives, Chand Sai, a Muslim in his current life, had seen the divine greatness of Shankaradeva and was set again on the path of spiritual progress.



Story: Mādhavadeva takes away the sin of his Guru Shankaradeva

Kalindi, the wife of Sant Shankaradeva, always complained that all he cared about was his disciples and his social and spiritual activities. He had no time for his own family members, she remarked.

One day, Shankaradeva returned from his morning walk and sat outside his house, with a forlorn look. Kalindi asked as to why he had not gone in to take his bath as he was accustomed to, after his walk. Shankaradeva responded that he had inadvertently committed a great sin that morning. While walking, he had gently pushed away a calf out of his way. But the creature unexpectedly collapsed and died. Therefore, he was tainted by bad karma, and must perform an atonement.

Kalindi agreed, and told him not to take a bath or even enter the house till he atoned for his sin. He must feed several devotees of Krishna, take their blessings and only then come inside. Soon thereafter, Madhavadeva, the principal disciple of Shankaradeva arrived. When he saw his Guru sitting outside the house with a pained look on his face, he asked for the reason. Upon learning what had happened, he immediately requested his Guru to go in and take his bath and resume his activities, saying that, "On your behalf, I will take all your sin on me. I will perform all the atonements for you and will even go to hell in your place if I have to."

When Kalindi heard Madhavadeva's words, she realized how much disciples of Shankaradeva loved him from their heart.

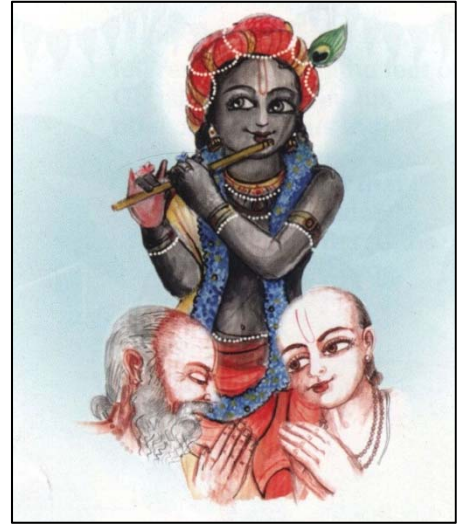
13.7 Mahendra Deva

Several centuries ago, in a village in the Indian state of Odisha, there lived a couple Raghavaiyya and Radhabai, and their daughter Vasanthi who was in love with Mahendra, a poor but a noble boy from the same village. However, Vasanthi's father wanted her to marry a rich man named Sukaveera. One day, Sukaveera and Raghavaiyya went to the city nearby to celebrate a temple festival. But on the way, Raghavaiyya caught small-pox, a very contagious disease that can cause death. Sukaveera and other companions left Raghavaiyya, saying that they did not want to catch the disease from him.

While Raghavaiya was suffering alone, Mahendra happened to pass that way. When he saw his beloved Vasanthi's father suffering, he decided to stay back and nurse Raghavaiya back to good health. Under his care, Raghavaiya overcame small-pox. He was very impressed by the selfless love of Mahendra and promised to marry Vasanthi to him once he reached his village back.

However, when Raghavaiya returned to the village, a wedding proposal for Vasanthi came from Sukaveera. Raghavaiya forgot all about the selfless love of Mahendra and the fact that he owed his very life to the service and care provided by the latter. He immediately agreed to Sukaveera's wedding proposal. When Mahendra heard about this, he was heartbroken. He called a meeting of the village elders and claimed that Raghavaiya had gone back on his word that he will marry his daughter Vasanthi to Mahendra. The village elders demanded proof for the promise, and asked Mahendra to produce witnesses.

Mahendra was now in a fix because the promise had been made when he was alone with Raghavaiya. He went to a Mandir of Krishna and cried his heart out. Very depressed and stressed out, he fell asleep. Bhagavān Krishna appeared to him in his dream and said, "Mahendra, you are a very good man and your love for Vasanthi and her family is pure. Go and tell the village elders that I, Krishna, will come as your witness because I did hear Raghavaiya make this promise to you. I will follow you to the village, but you have to make one promise – that you will never look back when I follow you. Trust me that I will come with you and never look back in doubt."



Mahendra woke up very happy and he started walking back towards the village. As he took his steps, he could hear the jingling sound of anklets of a man following him. However, at a little distance from the village, the sound became silent. Mahendra panicked and he turned around, only to discover that in place of Krishna, there was a beautiful and a large mūrti of Him.

Mahendra rushed to the village and related what had happened. Everyone rushed to the spot and found that suddenly, a beautiful Mūrti of Krishna had appeared at the spot. Moved by the miracle, Raghavaiya confessed to his guilt, and married his daughter to Mahendra.

A beautiful Mandir was constructed to house the Mūrti. Even today, numerous Hindus visit this Mandir of Sākshī Gopāla (i.e., Gopāla or Krishna who is Sākshī of witness) located between the great religious cities of Puri and Bhuvaneswar. The picture above shows the entrance of this Mandir.



The message of this story is that Bhagavān indeed witnesses whatever we do, even if there is no one else around. Also, Bhagavān goes out of the way to protect his truthful and loving Bhaktas (devotees). We only need to have faith in Him.

13.8 Madhusūdana Sarasvati: The Learned Scholar who learned the value of Devotion

Madhusudana Saraswati was a very renowned scholar of Hinduism in the 17th century. He was born in what is today Bangladesh, and lived in Bengal and Varanasi, where he wrote his famous works like the commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. He also organized the ascetic orders of Dashnami Sannyasins, and opened some of these orders to women and Shudras for admission. A beautiful story is narrated on how he forsook his ego and merged it with Krishna, melting his pride in the love for Krishna.³⁷



One day, he was busy writing his classic on Advaita Vedanta called the 'Advaita Siddhi'. Suddenly, a monk entered his study room, and rudely sat on a very high pedestal in front of him. Madhusudana Saraswati was taken aback but immediately upon sitting, the Sadhu asked Madhusudana Saraswati – “Tell me truthfully. During a philosophical debate with another scholar, do you feel agitated in your mind when you are not able to refute or respond to your opponent’s arguments?”

“Yes,” said Madhusudana Saraswati.

The Sadhu then asked, “And when you defeat an opponent, do you feel euphoric?”

“Yes,” replied Madhusudana Saraswati again.

The Sadhu smiled and said, “You have not shed your ego to the extent that you should have. I recommend that you worship Krishna. In the course of time, you will lose your ego, merge in Krishna, and experience a joy that you cannot get even if you defeat the greatest scholar on this earth in a debate. You are a great scholar of Advaita Vedanta, but you will get the fruit of your wisdom if you have devotion for Krishna.” Then, the Sadhu instructed Madhusudana Saraswati in the 8 syllabled mantra on Krishna and left.

Madhusudana Saraswati chanted the mantra for six months with the correct procedure but he saw no result. So he repeated his religious vow for another six months. But Krishna did not appear to him even in his dreams.

Despairing, Madhusudana Saraswati thought, ‘What a fool I was to have abandoned my profound study of Advaita Vedanta for the sake of this useless chanting and prayer.’

He left Varanasi and went to Kapildhara – a sacred waterfall close to Amarkantak on the Narmada river in central India. One day, a cobbler (the profession of a cobbler was considered a lowly profession in those days) came to him and said, ‘Swami-ji, looks like you have no patience or persistence. You gave up your search for Krishna in a mere twelve months, whereas even the less knowledgeable people spend their entire lifetime in His search.’

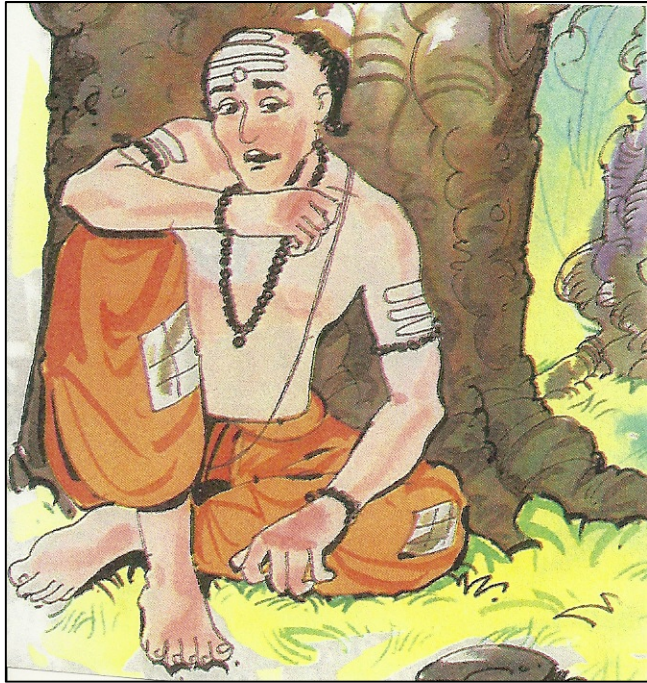
Madhusudana Saraswati was greatly humbled. “How could this cobbler know what I have been doing in the last one year?” he thought. He asked the cobbler, “How did you find out that I gave up my search for Krishna in a mere 12 months?”

The cobbler replied, “I have pleased a ghost, who tells me secret information about others.”

Madhusudana Saraswati replied, “I have not been able to see Krishna. Perhaps, you can teach me how to see your ghost. I am willing to humble myself and see that unclean ghost, because he may be able to take me to Krishna.”

³⁷ Swami Akhandananda Sarasvati (1966), pp. 15-16

The cobbler told him the correct procedure to propitiate the ghost. Madhusudana Saraswati now started worshipping the ghost, but when he did not appear even after three days of non-stop prayer, the ascetic got angry.



Now he, a scholar, walked himself to the hut of the humble cobbler and asked him why the ghost had not appeared.

The cobbler replied, “My mantra is effective and true indeed. But the ghost is scared to appear in front of you. He says that you have chanted the Gayatri mantra for many years, then the Vedas for a long time. And finally, the mantra of Krishna for a year. All this has made you very powerful. If the ghost appears in front of you, he will get incinerated immediately, and therefore he dare not come to you. The ghost says that you need to have more persistence and patience. Chant the same mantra of Krishna with devotion and faith for six more months, and you will see a magnificent result.”

Madhusudana Saraswati was chastened, and he did as the ghost had said. And after six months, when his ego had melted away, and his heart had been filled with the love of Krishna, he had a Divine vision. Moved by this vision, Madhusudana Saraswati then wrote his masterpiece, ‘Bhakti-rasāyana’ (The Alchemy of Devotion), a famous treatise on the path of Bhakti.

14. Saints of Nepal, Kashmir (India) and Punjab (India and Pakistan)

14.1 Sankhadhar Sākhwā (9th cent. CE)

Sankhadhar was a humble merchant in the city of Kathmandu in Nepal who lived in the 9th cent. CE when King Raghav Dev ruled the country. One day, the astrologer of the King told him that at a particular hour, the sand swept down the river Bishnumati in Kathmandu will be mixed with gold dust. The King hired porters to collect the precious sand at that hour, without telling them anything about gold in it. As the porters were on their way back to the palace, they decided to rest. Sankhadhar saw them and wondered why porters were carrying sand all the way to the palace.

He offered to purchase the sand from them and asked them to dump it in the basement of his home. The porters sold that sand to Sankhadhar, and then went back to the river to collect new sand. Back at his home, Sankhadhar examined the sand carefully and realized that there were gold particles in it. He separated the gold particles from the sand by sifting it through a sieve. Meanwhile, the sand that the King got from the porters turned out to be worthless.

Statue of Sankhadhar Sākhwā at Lalitpur (Nepal) →



Sankhadhar was a very kind man. Although he was just a poor trader, he decided that he will not use the gold extracted from the sand for his own benefit. In his time, many poor people of Kathmandu owed a lot of money to money-lenders, who used to harass their debtors a lot. He went to every poor man's home, and gave him enough gold so that he could repay his debt. In this way, all the poor debtors were able to free themselves from their debts, thanks to the kindness of Sankhadhar.

To honor the saintly trader Sankhadhar Sākhwā, a new calendar named 'Nepal Sambat' was started in Nepal in the year 879 CE. Therefore, in the Nepalese calendar, the year 2000 CE would actually be $2000 - 879 = 1121$ Nepal Sambat. Nepalese Hindus use this calendar even today to fix the days of their festivals and their new year. The government of Nepal has declared Sankhadhar Sākhwā a national hero.

14.2 Lalleshvarī (1320 – 1389 CE)

Story: Sant Lalleshwari's Two Pieces of Cloth

Lalleshvari was a great devotee of Shiva who lived in Kashmir. When she turned 26, her mother in law and her husband alleged that she was a bad woman. She was dragged by her cruel husband to the market place and insulted in front of everyone. Now Lalleshwari could take it no more. She left her home and spent all her time worshipping Bhagavān Shiva.

Lalleshwari began roaming from place to place, singing poems in praise of Shiva. But, most people abused her as she went down the streets begging for food. One day, someone threw a clod of mud on her, but she just did not respond, as usual. She just continued to sing the praises of Shiva.

A friend of hers, who was a cloth-merchant, pulled her into his shop before she got more abuses from the people collected on the street. He reasoned with her, "Why don't you live like other women. Or if you do not want to live like other wives, why don't you live far away from everyone in a cave. What do you get from all these abuses and attacks when you come to the towns, singing about Shiva?"

Lalleshwari just smiled, and asked him to get two pieces of cloth that were equal in weight. The shopkeeper cut and weighed two pieces of cloth, and gave them to her.

She threw one over her left shoulder, and the other over her right shoulder. She said, "Today, I will walk through the town again. Every time someone abuses me, I will tie a knot on the left piece of cloth. And when someone praises me or blesses me, I will tie a knot on the right piece of cloth."

When she returned that evening, it was clear that there were more knots on the left cloth, because many more people abused her compared to those who saw her goodness. The shopkeeper said, "See, I told you so." Lalleshwari asked him to bring the weighing balance, and weight the two pieces again.



As expected, the two pieces again weight exactly equal to each other. Lalleshwari smiled at the shop-keeper and said, "Look, although one cloth had more knots than the other, the two pieces still weigh the same. This shows that their difference is only external. In reality, both the pieces still have the same amount of yarn, the same amount of color. In the same way, things like praise and criticism, sorrow and happiness, pleasure and pain are all just on the surface, like the knots on the cloth. Therefore, whether I get more praise or more criticism, it does not bother me."

14.3 Guru Nānak (1469 – 1539), the First Sikh Guru

In the region of Punjab that extends over parts of northern India and Pakistan, there lived a series of 10 Gurus one after the other, starting with Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539 AD) who is regarded as the founder of the Sikh religion. Today, Sikhism is regarded as a separate religion from Hindu Dharma, but this is a recent separation. Millions of Hindus even today regard the Sikh Gurus as their own, whereas millions of Sikhs continue to worship in Hindu temples and follow Hindu customs. In this section, we will narrate a few episodes from the life of Guru Nanak which teach us very valuable lessons of life.



Guru Nanak teaches that we should say our Prayers sincerely

Guru Nanak once passed by a group of Muslims in Sultanpur (in district Kapurthala, Punjab, India) performing Namāz- the traditional way of Islamic worship that all believing Muslims are supposed to do five times every day. Guru Nanak commented that the true five prayers are speaking the truth, earning one's bread by hard labor, asking God for the good of everyone, keeping one's intentions and feelings pure, and fifth, chanting the praises of God.

The Muslim worshippers got very offended and thought that Guru Nanak was insulting their religion, by

suggesting that the Islamic way of offering the five prayers was not correct. Sultan Daulat Khan, who ruled the region of Sultanpur, said to Nanak, “You say that there is no difference between Hindus and Muslims. So why don’t you join us in our prayers in the mosque?” Guru Nanak agreed.

As the Muslim priest started calling out the Islamic prayer, the Muslim worshippers started their gestures required by their tradition. But, Guru Nanak just stood still in his place. And in fact, he burst out aloud into laughter twice! The priest was further enraged and urged the Sultan to order a severe punishment to Nanak for insulting Islam.

When Nawab Daulat Khan asked Nanak for the cause of his laughter, the latter replied, “How could I join in the prayers when the priest himself was not praying? He was merely uttering words from the Koran without any sincerity because in his mind, he was worried that the new calf that he had purchased recently might fall into the well in his home while he was here, leading the prayers. And you, Sultan, were not really saying your prayers whole-heartedly either. Instead, you were thinking all the time about whether your agents in Kabul had clinched the deal for buying horses or not.”

Everyone was shocked when the cleric as well as the Sultan confessed that they were indeed not praying whole-heartedly and what Guru Nanak had said about them was in fact correct. The Sultan fell at the feet of Guru Nanak and asked for forgiveness. Guru Nanak forgave him and advised him to be a just ruler that worked always for the welfare of his people.

Story: Do not hoard of too many things

Once when Guru Nanak was passing through the city of Lahore (now in Pakistan), a rich Hindu trader named Dhunichand invited the saint for a meal in his palatial mansion. Dhunichand was very proud of his wealth. Even while the Guru ate his meal, Dhunichand kept describing to him how rich he was, how much wealth he possessed and so on.

After Guru Nanak had finished his meal, he gave a sewing needle to Dhunichand and said, “Please keep this needle safely and take it to heaven after your death. When we meet there, I’d like to get it back from you.”

Dhunichand looked confused and he said, “But how can anyone take anything with us after we die? “Guru Nanak smiled and said, “Yes, you cannot carry even a small needle with you after you die. Then do you think you can carry all your wealth with you upon your death? If not, then what are you so proud of? Why are you hoarding all this money instead of sharing it with the poor?”

Dhunichand understood the message that one must not be proud of what we wear, what we eat, where we live. All our worldly possessions are left behind when we die. Dhunichand now became a changed man, and he devoted his wealth for constructing Dharamshalas (community places for worship, satsanga, weddings etc.) with his wealth.



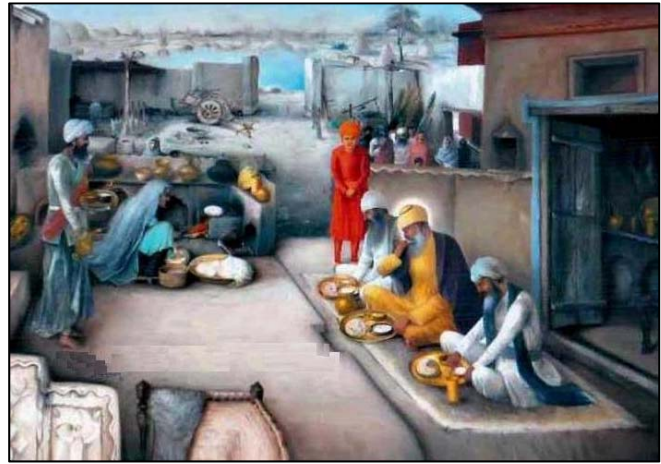
Teach Good Habits to Others:

One day, Guru Nanak and his companion named Mardana passed through a village. The villagers did not greet their visitors, and did not offer them any food or place to rest. Instead, they abused Guru Nanak and Mardana. But, the Guru did not feel upset at all. Instead, he left the village promptly and blessed its villagers saying, “May your village thrive, and its people never get uprooted.”

Then, Mardana and Guru Nanak reached another village, whose inhabitants were very good natured. They welcomed their visitors, fed them, and offered them a place to stay. When the Guru left the village, he cursed the people there, "May you all get uprooted, and get scattered in all directions."

Mardana was really puzzled when he heard this, and asked the Guru for an explanation.

Guru Nanak explained, "I wish that the residents of the first village do not spread out and teach their bad mannerisms to others. On the other hand, I want that the good villagers in the second village should spread out in all directions and set an example for everyone."



Story: Guru Nanak prefers the Roti of Hard-Working Lālo than the Delicacies of Bhāgo

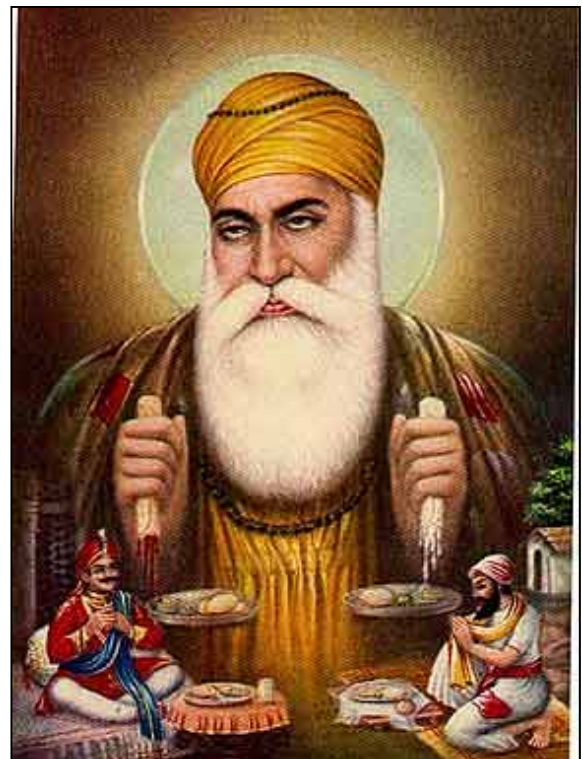
Guru Nanak once visited the village of Saidpur (now called Eminabad, in Pakistan). Everyone was eager to serve him.

It happened that Malik Bhago, a rich landlord of Kshatriya caste and an official of the local Pathan Nawab, was giving a feast. He had invited all religious and holy men to join in the feast. When he came to know that a Saint was staying at the house of Lalo, Malik Bhago sent a servant to invite Guru Nanak to join in the feast. The Guru declined the invitation, but when Malik Bhago sent his man repeatedly requesting the Guru to come, the Guru finally went to his house.

Malik Bhago asked the Guru, "Why do you refuse my bread and eat at the house of a low-caste Hindu, though you are a holy man of high-caste?" The Guru replied, "I have no caste, for me all men are equal." "Then why did you decline to join my feast?" asked Malik Bhago. Answered the Guru, "Do you really want to know?" Bhago said, "Yes, I want to know why you preferred Lalo's simple bread to my food." The Guru asked Bhago to bring some of his food, and asked Lalo to do the same. When the food was brought by both, Guru Sahib took a piece from Lalo's food in one hand, and a piece from Bhago's food in the other. When he squeezed his hands, from Lalo's food oozed out drops of milk, and from Bhago's food, drops of blood.

The Guru said, "Now you see why I declined to join your feast; your food is blood stained because you have accumulated your wealth by exploiting the poor, while Lalo earns his bread by the sweat of his brow, and shares his earnings with the needy." Malik Bhago was much ashamed at this and became speechless. He fell at the Guru's feet and prayed for mercy. All the people gathered there, bowed in humility before the Guru.

The Guru looked at them with a loving glance and said, "That which belongs to another is unlawful, and as dirty as eating the flesh of the dead. A Guru showers his grace on those who refrain from eating the dead. The flesh of the dead



does not become lawful by breathing God's Name over it. Nor do we attain salvation by merely reciting the holy verses."

Moral of the Story: A poor, honest and hard-working man's food is worthy more than that of a rich man who is dishonest, miserly and who exploits others.

Story: Guru Nanak convinces Sufi Hamzargos to Forgive

Once on his way to the famous pilgrim center of Vaishno Devi in Jammu, Guru Nanak stopped in the city of Sialkot (now in Pakistan). There, he heard that the entire town was terrified of the curse of a Sufi named Hamzargos, who threatened to destroy the entire city by his spiritual powers.



Guru Nanak learned that a childless Hindu couple had earlier approached the Sufi for a child. The Sufi blessed them on the condition that the couple will gift their child to him after its birth. But after the couple became parents, they reneged on their promise. This infuriated the Sufi and he undertook a forty day fast to bring a calamity upon the entire city.

The residents of Sialkot pleaded with Guru Nanak to intercede on their behalf and pacify the angry Sufi. The Guru agreed and approached the Sufi saying, "Why should you punish the entire city for the fault of a single couple? Do you think the destruction of thousands of innocent people, who have nothing to do with that couple's misdeed, will bring you happiness? True happiness and contentment can result not from revenge, but only from forgiveness, love and contentment."

The Sufi was impressed with Guru Nanak's teaching and he gave up his fast as well as forgave the residents of city. The site where Guru Nanak halted and stayed in Sialkot under a tree was later on adorned with a Gurudwara called "Gurudwara Babe di Beri." The Ber (zizyphus jububa) bush and the adjacent well from which the Guru drank water still exist but the whole area is today in shambles due to neglect by the local Muslim population.



Story: Guru Nanak crushes the pride of Sufi Wali Kandhārī

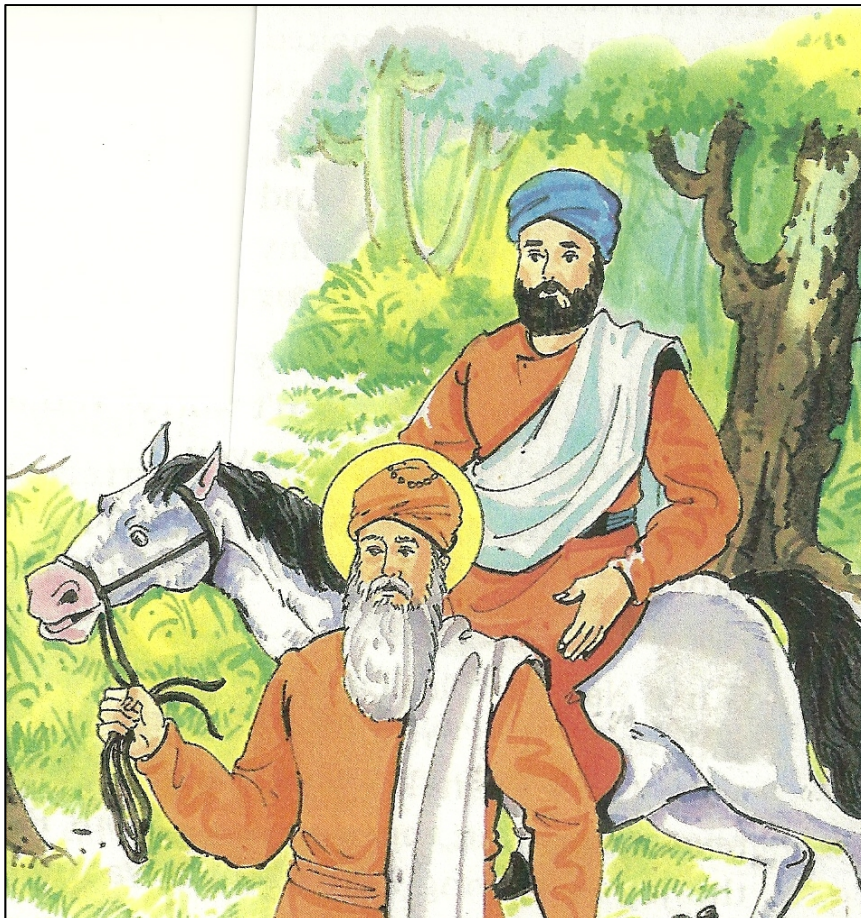
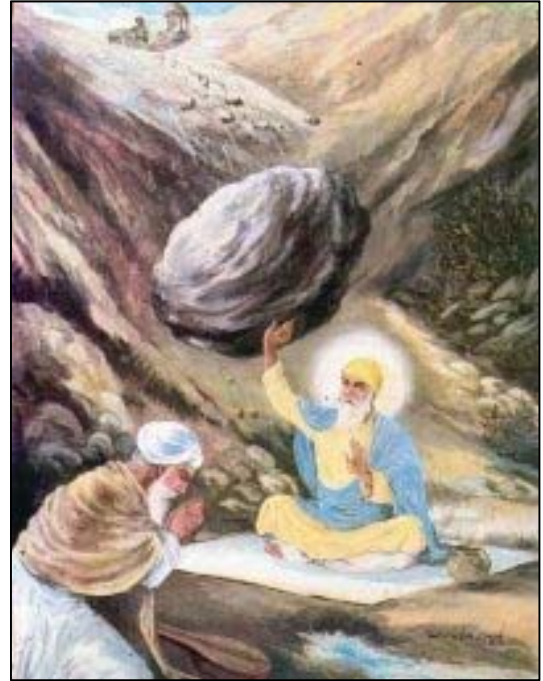
In the year 1521, Guru Nanak visited Hasan Abdal, a place in northern Pakistan, where there was a hill on top of which there was a spring of fresh water. This spring was the only source of fresh water in the region, and it flowed down from the hill to the town below.

A few years earlier, a Muslim Afghan Sufi (Sufis are Muslim Saints who follow the path of spirituality, but many of them were also religious warriors who fought against non-Muslims) named Wali Kandhari settled down next to the spring. In the course of time, people of that time started paying visits to Wali Kandhari and offer respects to him. His little hut became a center for pilgrimage. Wali Kandhari now became proud, and he started using his influence to harass the Hindus and persuade them to convert to

Islam.

When Guru Nanak visited the area, the locals were very impressed by his spirituality and teachings, and began to flock to him for his darshan. This really hurt the pride of Wali Kandhari, and he became jealous and angry. As a result, he shut the spring on his hill, depriving the town below of all water. The people then appealed to the Sufi to resume their water supply, but he scornfully said, "Ask your Guru Nanak for water because now you respect him and not me." When the people went to Guru Nanak, he said, "Do not worry because Bhagavān takes care of everyone." Guru Nanak then sent his Muslim disciple Mardana up the hill with a request to release the source of water. But the Sufi got angry with him, abused him and sent him back. Guru Nanak asked Mardana to go back several times and ask for water humbly, but each time, he was abused by Wali Kandhari and asked to get lost.

Finally, Guru Nanak lifted a rock where he was sitting, and miraculously, a clear stream of water appeared at that spot! Meanwhile, the spring at the top of the hill where Wali Kandhari lived dried up. The Sufi was mad at this, and he pushed a huge boulder from the hill towards Guru Nanak, thinking that the Guru will be crushed to death. But Guru Nanak sat still, with a calm mind. As soon as the boulder reached Guru Nanak, he merely touched it, and the boulder stopped immediately! Wali Kandhari was shocked because it was humanly impossible for such a huge boulder hurtling down at that speed to get stopped. He realized that Guru Nanak was a great Sant, and he came down from the hill and apologized to him. Guru Nanak asked him to give up his pride and anger, and treat all human beings, irrespective of their religion, as children of Bhagavān.



Guru Nanak serves his own disciple Lehna

Towards the last years of his life, Guru Nanak settled down in a place called Kartarpur (today in Pakistan, across the Ravi river from the border of the Gurdaspur district in India), where a devotee gave him and his disciples some land. Guru Nanak tilled and cultivated his own plot because he believed in earning his bread through his own labor, even though he headed a religious community.

Lehna from Khadur, a small village close to the city of Amritsar, had once heard some verses of Guru Nanak being recited. He was very impressed and moved by the profundity of the hymns. Desiring to have a darshana of Guru Nanak, he arrived at Kartarpur. While searching for Guru Nanak, he encountered an elderly man

working in a field.

Approaching the latter, Lehna asked him if he knew the whereabouts of Guru Nanak. The farmer replied, “Let me finish my work in this mustard field, and I will take you there myself.” Lehna asked the farmer, “Do you know if he meets visitors who are strangers? What does he look like? Does he live quite far from here?” The farmer smiled and responded to all the questions. When the farmer finished his work, he asked Lehna to mount his horse as he must have been tired walking a long distance from Khadur. Then, the farmer pulled the horse gently by its reins and walked them to the house of Guru Nanak.

Lehna entered the house and was ushered in to the room of Guru Nanak by his disciples gathered outside. When he entered the room, he was shocked to see that the farmer who had led him to the house now sat on the Guru’s seat! Lehna felt very bad and he apologized to the Guru, “Gurudev, I did not realize that it was you doing the farming work in the field. I should not have let you walk while I myself came here on your horse.” Guru Nanak smiled and said, “You do not have to feel sorry for anything. You are my guest, and it was my duty to take care of you.”

Lehna had tears in his eyes and he asked for forgiveness multiple times. He asked Guru for permission to stay with him, so that he can serve him. Guru Nanak could see that Lehna had the spark of spirituality in him, and so he obliged. After a few years, Lehna succeeded Guru Nanak as Guru Angad, the second spiritual head of the nascent Sikh community.

14.4 Baba Lāl Dayāl



Baba Dayāl is one of the long-lived saints of Hinduism. He was born in 1412 CE in Kasur, near Lahore. He was a child prodigy and mastered several Hindu scriptures at a young age. He developed the feeling of vairāgya, or indifference towards the world, and finally met his Guru Swami Chaitanyadeo on River Ravi in Lahore. His Guru taught him many Yogic techniques, such as flying in the air, reviving the dead, or disappearing and reappearing. However, Baba Lal Dayal did not attach much importance to these Yogic Siddhis.

During the reign of Emperor Shah Jehan, Baba Dayal took his Guru’s blessings and went on a pilgrimage across north and NW India all the way to Afghanistan with his 22 selected disciples. The crown prince Dara Shikoh learned about the great saint and wrote to him respectfully, requesting a meeting. The conversation that took place between Baba Lal Dayal and Dara Shikoh in Lahore is recorded in the form of questions and answers, and was published from Lahore in 1912 with the title *Asrare Marphat*.

Baba Lal Dayal left his mortal body in the year 1712, and his Samadhi exists in a village called Dhyampur close to the town of Batala (district Gurdaspur) in Punjab. A fair is held at the site during Dussehra and Baisakhi Dashmi in the Vaishnava Math there. Childless couples and sick people come for the Baba’s blessings at his Samadhi in the hope of getting progeny and good health. A continuous succession of disciples has headed the Math since 1712 to this day.

14.5 Guru Arjan Dev constructs the Loftiest Mandir in Amritsar

The fifth Sikh Guru Shri Arjan Dev decided to construct a beautiful Mandir at the center of a pond called Ramseur in Amritsar in northern India. His disciples came to him and said, “Guru-ji, this Mandir should be the tallest building in the area. This will signify its importance.”

The Guru smiled and said, “There is no need to have a tall building for the Mandir. It is only a fruit laden tree whose branches bow.” And so, the Harimandir was constructed and its height was kept low. When the Mandir was completed, Guru Arjan Dev composed a hymn comparing the Mandir in the middle of lake to Hari (Vishnu) lying on the Sheshanāga in the ocean of milk.

14.6 Guru Tegh Bahādur: Sacrificing one’s life for the sake of Dharma

Emperor Aurangzeb, who ruled India from 1658 – 1707 CE was a very fanatical Muslim ruler. He destroyed several temples of Hindus, dismissed his Hindu employees from their jobs or underpaid them, and even denied them promotion. He imposed several special taxes on the non-Muslims, and also banned the celebration of Hindu festivals and other religious ceremonies. In the year 1765, he also issued orders to burn Hindu scriptures in several cities to stop all types of traditional Hindu education. The Emperor decided that in order to convert all Hindus to Islam, it was very important to first convert the Brahmanas, who were their religious leaders.



And therefore, he ordered his Governors to capture the Brahmanas, snap the sacred thread that they wore around their right shoulders and coerce them to convert. The persecution of Hindus was especially very severe in Kashmir. A group of Kashmiri Hindus went to the Amarnath cave shrine of Shiva, and prayed to protect their religion. Shiva appeared in a dream to Pandit Kriparam Dutt, their leader, and asked him to seek the help of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Guru of the Sikh community.

The Pandits of Kashmir appealed to Guru Tegh Bahadur to help them. He asked them to convey the following message to

Aurangzeb, “If you succeed in converting me to Islam, then all the Hindus of Kashmir will also do so. But if you fail to make me a Muslim, then you will not force Kashmir’s Hindus to convert either.” Aurangzeb accepted. Guru Tegh Bahadur left for Delhi to see the Emperor with his three disciples, who were willing to risk their lives as well.

At Delhi, the Guru and his disciples were immediately imprisoned. The Muslim Qazi (magistrate) asked the Guru to either convert to Islam, or face death. When the Guru did not relent, they started torturing his three disciples and killed them one by one in front of the eyes of the Guru. The first disciple was sawed into two pieces alive. The second was boiled to death in an oil cauldron. The third was wrapped in a bale of cotton and was burnt to death. The Guru was deeply pained but refused to convert to Islam. The Emperor asked the Guru to show a miracle if he wanted to save his life. But the Guru refused, saying that he cannot disobey God’s rules by showing miracles.



It was ordered that the Guru would be beheaded if he did not convert. But the brave Guru agreed to face death rather than give up his religion. The site where he was beheaded is today a Sikh shrine in Delhi. The great sacrifice of the Guru was possible because the Guru valued his religion more than his life, and was willing to stand up for his principles as a brave man, and as a spiritual person who believed in the eternity of the soul. His is an example of a true devotee of Bhagavān who accepted his murder as the will of Bhagavān, and therefore did not forsake his principles.

The sacrifice of the Guru did not go in vain. His son, Guru Gobind Singh, raised an army of Sikhs within a few decades. And within less than a century, the Sikh warriors freed large parts of the region of Punjab in India from the Islamic rule.

15. Saintly Bhaktas of Rama & Krishna from northern India and Pakistan

15.1 Goswami Tulsidas (1532 – 1623 CE)

The most famous translation of Valmiki's Ramayana from Sanskrit is the Rāmacharitmānasa, which was written by Sant Tulsidas in Awadhi, which is a type ('dialect') of the Hindi language.

Sant Tulsidas is considered an Avatāra of Rishi Valmiki in our modern times. He was born to Pundit Atmaram Dubey and his wife Hulsī in a village in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Strangely, Tulsidas was born with all 32 teeth in his mouth like an adult, and his body was like that of a 5 year old child! At his birth, he did not cry, but instead uttered the word 'Rama'.

Soon after the birth, his mother Hulsī died. When Pundit Dubey made an astrological horoscope of the child, he discovered that Tulsidas would be very unlucky for his parents. Therefore, he abandoned the child and asked their maid Chunnīyā to take care of the baby.



When Tulsidas was 5 years old, even Chunnīyā died. Tulsidas was then forced to live the life of a poor orphan who had to beg for his food to fill his stomach every day. It is said, that Devi Parvati would assume the form of a young woman and appeared every day in front of Tulsidas to feed him in his poverty.

A Sadhu named Swami Naraharidās took compassion on the boy and made him his disciple. Tulsidas then studied the Hindu scriptures under Swami Narharidās, till the latter also died. Swami Narharidas taught him the Ramayana – the beautiful life-story of Lord Rama that was composed by Sage Valmiki thousands of years earlier. Influenced by the Ramayana, Tulsidas became a devotee of Lord Rama.

Tulsidas married a woman named Ratnāvalī and settled down in the Hindu sacred city of Varanasi. For the first time in his life, he found someone who really loved him. Therefore, Tulsidas too loved his wife a lot and took very good care of her. One day, Tulsidas went to a Mandir to worship Lord Hanuman. In the meantime, Ratnāvalī got a message to visit her father's home as soon as possible. When Tulsidas returned to his home, he found his wife missing. So, he decided to go to Ratnāvalī's father's home on the other side of the river. It was raining very heavily and there was a flood in the Ganga river, which flows through Varanasi. No boatman would take Tulsidas across the river because of the rain and floods. Tulsidas used a floating corpse on the river as a floater and crossed the river to go to the other bank. When he reached the home of Ratnāvalī's father, he was in such a hurry that he did not want to take the stairs to her room upstairs. He saw a snake hanging from the window and thinking of it to be a rope, he climbed up to her room.

When Ratnāvalī discovered the risks her husband took to meet her, she got very upset and said to him, "You are so much in love with me, but I am just a body made of bones and flesh. If you had loved Lord Rama even half as much as you love me, you would be a lot happier."



much more. But the Ramayana which was written by Sage Valmiki was a very large book. It had 24000 verses. Moreover, it was in the Sanskrit language, which the common man did not understand those days.

So he first thought of shortening the Ramayana and write a new version of it in Sanskrit with fewer verses. Every day, he wrote some verses in Sanskrit on a piece of paper. These verses described some part of the life of Lord Rama. But the next morning, Tulsidas saw that the sheet of paper on which he wrote the verses had become blank! This happened several days in a row. Then one night, Bhagavān Shiva appeared to him in a dream and said to him – “Tulsidas, do not write the Ramayana again in Sanskrit, because only scholars can understand this language these days. I want you to go to Ayodhya, where Lord Rama had lived. There you should write your Ramayana in the language Awadhi, which the common people speak in that city.”

Tulsidas understood the command of Shiva and proceeded to Ayodhya. He started composing his Ramayana in Awadhi, and called this version the ‘Ramacharitmanas’, which means – “The Holy Manasarovar Lake of the acts of Rama.” What the title really means that whosoever studies the Ramacharitmanas with devotion, will get purified just as we become purified by taking a holy dip in the Manasarovar Lake, which is close to the home (Mount Kailash) of Lord Shiva. The Ramacharitmanas was started by Tulsidas on a day which was the wedding anniversary of Lord Rama and Devi Sita. After completing more than half of the book, he moved back to the city of Varanasi and completed it 2 years, 2 months and 26 days later on the Rāmanavamī day, which is the birthday of Lord Rama.

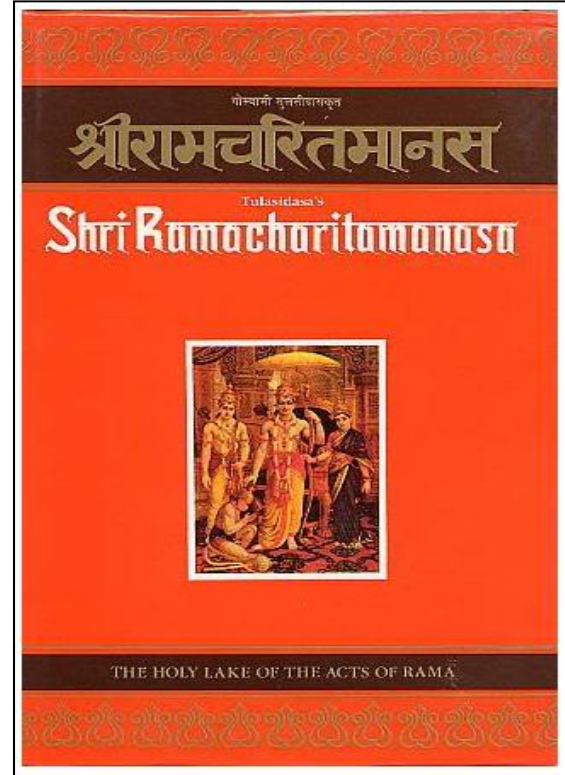
Tulsidas then started teaching the Ramacharitmanas to people in Varanasi. The book was so beautiful, musical and gave just such a wonderful description of the life of Lord Rama that soon, large crowds started attending his lectures. For the first time, they could understand the beautiful life of Lord Rama, because the Ramacharitmanas was in Awadhi, a type of the Hindi language which was spoken by the common man. This caused some jealousy amongst the other local Pundits.

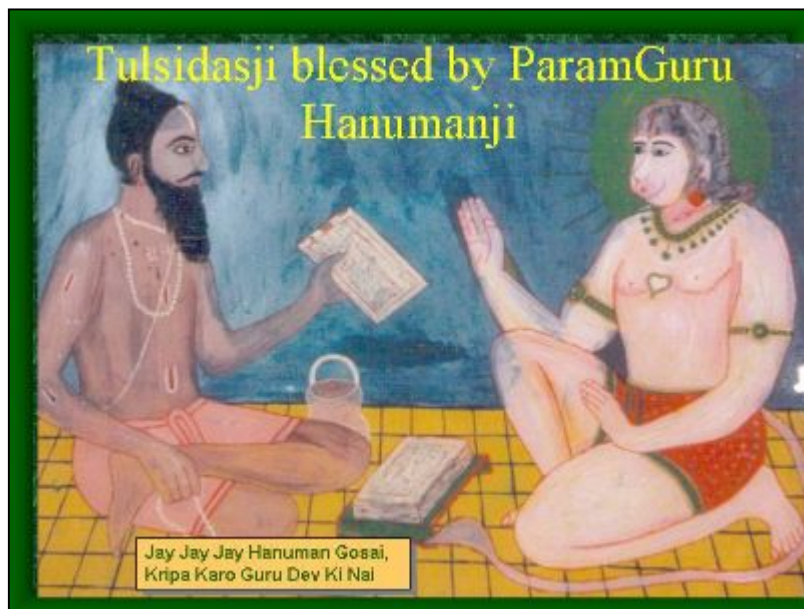
They complained that Hindu scriptures should only be written in Sanskrit and not in any other language.

One night, the jealous Pundits sent some thieves to steal the manuscript of Ramacharitmanas from the hut in which Tulsidas lived. When the thieves arrived in the dark, they saw two very handsome princes guarding the hut.

These words of Ratnavali shocked Tulsidas. Soon, he abandoned his family life, and took to the worship of Lord Rama and became a Sadhu. He called his wife his Guru for having awakened him from his sleep so that he could see the Lord.

Tulsidas noted that India at that time was ruled by foreign Muslim rulers who were very harsh on the Hindus. All of our major temples had been demolished by them. Our scriptures were being burned. People were being forcibly asked to give up their religion and become Muslims. And our priests, the Brahmanas, were being tortured. The government officials often troubled the common man by extracting very heavy taxes. Therefore, Tulsidas thought that he should teach the Ramayana to everyone, because it describes the life story of Lord Rama, who was an ideal ruler, an ideal son and





Suddenly, a monkey attacked the thieves and they fled in terror. The next morning, when Tulsidas heard about this episode, he was very troubled because he realized that the two princes were none other than Bhagavān Rama and his brother Lakshmana. And the monkey was none other than Lord Hanuman.

So Tulsidas felt sorry that Lord Rama himself took the trouble to protect him and the Ramacharitmanas. He did not want this to happen again and asked his friend Raja Mansingh, who was a relative of Emperor Akbar of India, to get many more copies of the Ramacharitmanas made for safety. The thieves too gave up stealing and they became devotees of Bhagavān Rama.

They also asked Sant Tulsidas for forgiveness and he forgave them.

Now the jealous Pundits objected to the fact that Tulsidas worshipped Lord Shiva sometimes and yet he wrote



his scripture on the life of Rama. How could he be loyal to two Devatas at the same time? The Pundits forgot that all these Devatas are the different forms of the same God. To test Tulsidas, they asked him to place his manuscript of the Ramacharitmanas inside the Kashi Vishvanath Temple, the holiest Shiva Mandir in Varanasi. On top of this book, they placed copies of the four Vedas (our holiest scriptures) and then shut the doors of the Mandir.

When the doors were opened the next morning, a miracle had happened. The Ramacharitmanas copy was now on the top, and 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram' (the signature of Bhagavān Shiva) was written on its front cover. This meant that Lord Shiva himself had decided that Tulsī's Ramacharitmanas was as holy as the Vedas, which are themselves holiest scriptures of Hinduism.

The Pundits felt really ashamed and they asked the Saint for forgiveness. Thereafter, he was allowed to give lectures on the Ramacharitmanas without any trouble. Many people made copies of the book and they started singing it in every village.

According to the Hindu tradition, whenever we recite the story of Lord Rama, Lord Hanuman comes in disguise or in an invisible form to listen to the story because he is very devoted to Lord Rama and likes to hear the story as many times as possible.

Tulsidas noted that every day, when he would start teaching his Ramacharitmanas, a leper would be the first person to arrive, and the last person to leave. Tulsidas realized that this leper was none other than Shri Hanuman. So one day, he followed the leper after his recitation into the forest and begged him to show his true form. And lo, the leper became Lord Hanuman. The site where Tulsidas met Lord Hanuman now has a famous temple called Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir in Varanasi.

Tulsidas requested Lord Hanuman that he should be able to meet Lord Rama at least once. Hanuman advised Tulsidas to go to a place Chitrakoot close to Yamuna River, where Lord Rama had spent some time during his exile. There, Tulsidas was one day grinding some sandal-wood (*chandan*) to make a fragrant paste when two handsome princes appeared before him. They requested Tulsidas to apply 'Tilak' to them on their foreheads.

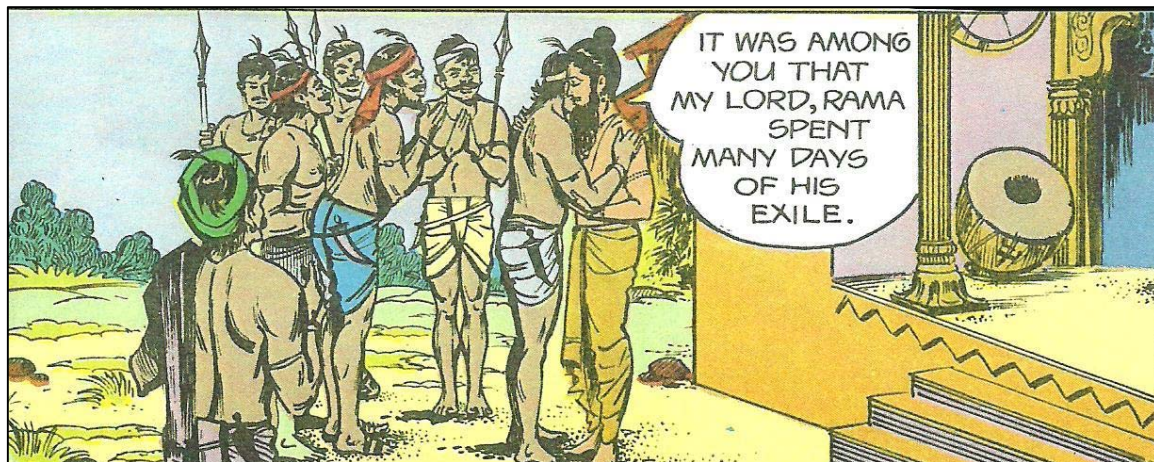
Hanuman-ji suddenly appeared there and hinted to the Saint that these were no other than Rama and Lakshmana. Tulsidas was so overjoyed on seeing Bhagavān Rama that he forgot to apply the Tilak. Then Rama himself took the chandan and applied the Tilak to his forehead and then to the forehead of Tulsidas.

When Tulsidas was old, he became very ill. So he wrote a beautiful poem called 'Vinaya Patrika' in which he prayed to Lord Rama to take all his pain and sadness away. Eventually, in 1623 CE, Goswami Tulsidas passed away at the 'Asi Ghāt' location in Varanasi. Earlier, Tulsidas also wrote many other beautiful prayers to Lord Rama and Lord Hanuman and to other Devi-Devatas. The famous Hanuman Chālisā was written by Tulsidas to worship Hanuman in 40 verses. It is said to be the second most popular of all the prayers that are recited by Hindus today.

In his Rāmagyā Prashnāvali, Tulsidas listed the names of his friends and individuals who participated in his religious discourses. Other than a few, all the friends and participants appear to be from the so-called low castes.

Numerous examples from his life show his regard for people from all social classes. Once, Sant Nābhādās invited him for a meal at his home. Nābhādās was of the 'Dom' sub caste, considered untouchables. Tulsidas got busy and forgot to show up on time. That night, when he remembered the invitation, he really regretted his memory lapse. He immediately rushed to the home of the Sant and requested for leftovers so that he could fulfill his promise.

One day, Tulsidas was seated inside a temple and he heard a lot of commotion outside. Upon enquiry, he discovered that some Bhil tribals wanted to enter the Mandir to meet Tulsidas, but they were not being allowed to do so. Some priests were objecting that Bhils being tribals will pollute the Mandir by entering it.



As soon as Tulsidas heard of this, he rushed outside and greeted the Bhils with reverence. He said, “I bow to the Bhils because my Rama had spent time in their company during his fourteen year exile in the forest.”

Tulsidas is one of the greatest Saints of Hindus. His beautiful Ramacharitmanas and other works like the Hanuman Chalisa are studied and sung by millions even today. He wrote all these works at a time when we Hindus were suffering a lot under the Moghul rule. He inspired our ancestors to draw good morals from the life of Lord Rama, to treat everyone with compassion and kindness, to have faith and devotion in Rama and to never lose hope and courage.

What do we learn from the life of Tulsidas?

The life of Tulsidas shows us that even if we have a lot of problems and difficulties in our lives, we should continue to love Rama, and have deep faith in him. Lord Rama will surely hear our prayers and help us out.

Tulsidas wrote his Ramacharitmanas in the language of the common people, and not in Sanskrit. But Bhagavān Shiva decided that it was as sacred as the holy Vedas in Sanskrit. Therefore another message from the life of Tulsidas is that even though Sanskrit is the holy language for us Hindus, Īshvara will listen to our prayers no matter which language we use to worship him.

The important thing to keep in mind is that we should remember God with faith and devotion, no matter what the language of our prayers is.

Did you know?



The original copy of the Ramacharitmanas with Shiva's signature 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram' still exists with a family in the city of Varanasi. A portion of another copy written by Tulsidas himself is in the village where he was born. This second copy is shown in the picture on the left. Many people memorize the entire Ramacharitmanas by heart.

The Hanumān Chālīsā hymn of Tulsidas is one of the most popular hymns recited by Hindus all over

the world. There is a very interesting story about it from a country called Guyana.

The country of Guyana in the continent of South America has a large Hindu population. In the year 1999, a Muslim criminal was sentenced to death. On the day of his hanging, he expressed a wish to hear the Hanumān Chālīsā from a Hindu preacher. Surprisingly, just some time after he had heard the hymn, an order came to release him because the court case against him had been dismissed because of a legal loophole. The Muslim prisoner thanked Hanuman for saving his life. Since then, all prisoners in that jail in Guyana have wanted to hear the Hanumān Chālīsā, whether they were Hindu or non-Hindu, in the hope that they will be released from the jail.³⁸



15.2 Sūrdās, the blind Saint (1478 – 1573 CE)

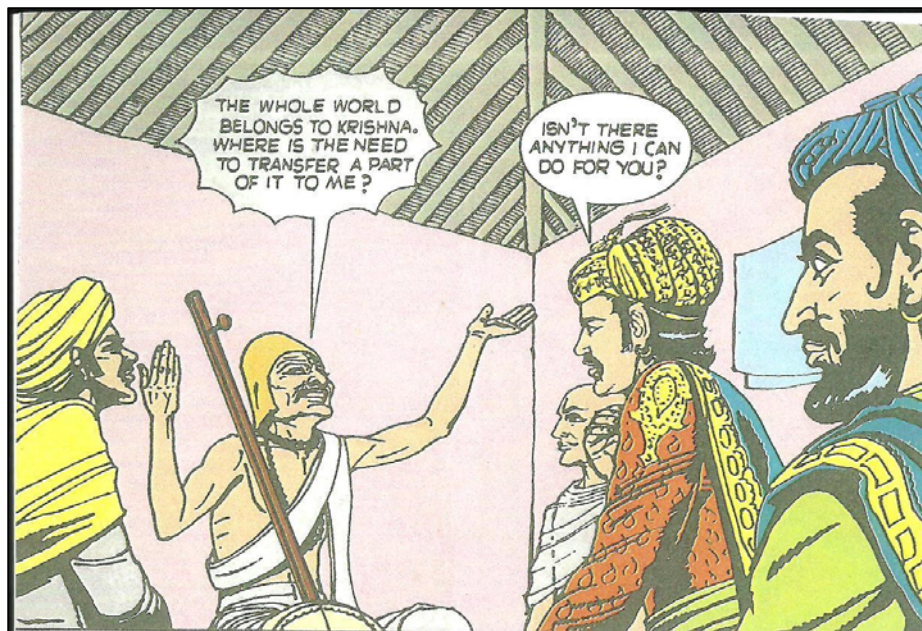
Another Sant who lived a little before Tulsidas was the Sant Surdas. Sant Surdas was born blind. Since his childhood, he was very interested in following groups of wandering musicians who sang the praises of Devis and

³⁸ <http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Cultural/Hindus%20of%20South%20America.htm>

Devatas. One day, he decided to follow a wandering party and left his home. He sang beautiful songs to Bhagavān, and fed himself by donations given by kind devotees. A rich man was one day so impressed with his bhajans that he had a hut constructed for the blind musician, and requested Surdas to live in it.

Sant Vallabhāchārya, a great Bhakta of Krishna, also heard about Surdas. He thought, “How wonderful it would be if Surdas were to sing the praises of Krishna?” He approached Surdas and taught him about the life of Krishna from the Hindu scripture called Shrimad Bhāgvatam. Surdas acknowledged him as his Guru, and thereafter, decided to devote his life to singing the praises of Krishna.

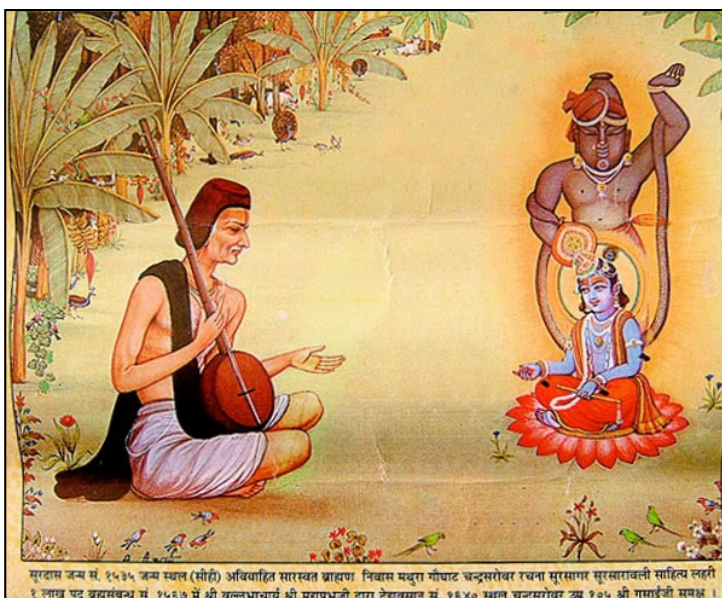
Surdas composed a new devotional song on Krishna every morning and then sang it at the Shreenath-ji Mandir in Mathura. His beautiful lyrics and songs became popular very fast, and he became a living legend. Once, Tansen, the greatest singer of those times, sang one of Surdas’ songs in the royal court of Emperor Akbar who ruled much of India from 1556 to 1605 CE.



The Emperor was greatly charmed by the song, and sent a messenger with a request to Surdas that he should come and sing his Bhajans on Krishna at the royal court. But, the Sant responded that he sings only in and around the sacred region of Braj (where Krishna spent his childhood) and will not sing in any royal court.

Akbar then went personally to Surdas’ hut and requested him to sing a new Bhajan for him. Pleased with the song, Akbar offered Surdas a few villages as his personal property if he were to sing at the royal court. But Surdas declined the gift,

saying, that the entire world belongs to Krishna, and therefore he did not want any part of it. Surdas also said that the court of Krishna in the Mandir was greater than all royal courts.



Akbar was impressed by the Bhakti of the Sant, and offered to give him any gift he asked for. To his surprise, Surdas merely requested, “Emperor, please do not ask me again to come to the royal court.” Akbar realized that Surdas was a great saint, and therefore he left respectfully. One day, Surdas fell into a well. He sang out to Krishna. Miraculously, a couple appeared soon and pulled him out of the well.

Surdas realized that the couple was none other than Radha and Krishna. Moved by the devotion of Surdas, Radha came back to see Surdas, who immediately caught her feet to get her blessings. Radha was able to get away, but in the process, her anklets fell off. She asked Surdas

to return them, but he insisted, “How do I know they are yours because I cannot see.”

Radha restored his vision, and at once, he saw none other than Bhagavān Krishna and Radha in front of him. Krishna requested Surdas to ask for some boons because He was very pleased with the devotion of the Saint.

But Surdas asked for only one thing – “Please make me blind again. I have seen my Lord with my own eyes. And now I do not wish to see anything else.” Krishna insisted that this would be unfair to Surdas. He could keep his vision and also ask for something else. But Surdas insisted – “No, please make me blind again. But give me the boon that I always remain devoted to you as your servant.”

Did you know?

Surdas is considered the greatest poet of Hindi language to have ever lived. About 6000 of his songs on Krishna survive and skilled musicians can sing them with instruments to this day. In many parts of north India, blind people are referred to as ‘Surdas’ in the memory of this Saint, and because it is considered too rude to address a blind person as ‘blind.’

15.3 Mīrābāī, the Andal of North India

Mīrābāī was born in the family of a political chief in the Indian state of Rajasthan. When she was a little girl, a



Saint named Ravidās is said to have given her a mūrti of Krishna which she adored and worshipped with her whole heart. One day, she was watching a marriage procession pass by her home, and asked her mother, “Who is my husband?” Her mother replied, “Your husband will be Krishna.” Mīrābāī took her mother’s words to heart.

When she grew older, she was married to Bhojarāja, the crown prince of the famous Hindu kingdom of Chittor. But, her in-laws were all worshippers of Devi whereas Mīrābāī spent her time worshipping Krishna. They did not like the fact that she would go out of the palace to worship in a Krishna Mandir and mingle with Sadhus and common people. However, her husband was understanding, and he got a small Krishna mandir constructed right within the palace. Mīrābāī now started inviting Bhaktas and Sadhus to her temple in the palace. Unfortunately for her, Bhojarāja died young, and his younger brother became the King of Chittor.

Mīrābāī’S problems now increased. She accepted Ravidās, a Saint (who was a cobbler) as her Guru. This infuriated her royal in-laws, who thought that it was insulting to them that a Princess have a cobbler as a Guru. But

Mīrābāī judged others not by how rich or what caste they were, but whether they had devotion for Bhagavān in their heart or not. She started spending her entire days in the Krishna Mandir, singing her own beautiful bhajans on Krishna, and serving other Bhaktas of Krishna. Her fame spread far and wide, and it is believed that even Emperor Akbar (an

enemy of the Ruler of Chittor) came in disguise to listen to her and pay his respects. Her brother in law was not amused at this turn of events.



He tried to kill her in numerous ways. First, he sent her a glass of milk in which some poison had been added, with the false information that it was the prasāda from Krishna Mandir. Miraculously, Mīrābāī was not affected by the poison as she drank the glass with faith in Krishna.

Then, he had a cobra sent to her in a basket with the message that it was a garland for Krishna's mūrti. And when she did open the basket, the snake had turned into a garland. Her in-laws tried many other ways to hurt her.

Finally, tired of their harassment, she left Chittor at the advice of Sant Tulsidas and went to Braj region (encompassing Mathura and Vrindāvan towns) where Krishna had spent his childhood.

After spending some time there, she travelled to Dwaraka, where Krishna spent his adulthood, and spent most of her time at the Dwarakadheesh Mandir (at the site of Krishna's

old palace). Meanwhile, Chittor faced one problem after the other. Everyone blamed the royal family for inviting trouble by harassing a saint like Mīrābāī. Udaysingh had now become the new king of Chittor. He sent a group of respectable people to Dwaraka to persuade her to return to Chittor.

But Mīrābāī had devoted her entire life to Krishna. When she met with the group, she asked them to wait outside the temple. And as she entered the Mandir, she converted into a pillar of light that merged with the mūrti of Krishna, as everyone watched in wonder!

Mīrābāī wrote several beautiful bhajans in the languages of northern India. About 400 of them have survived and are sung with great devotion by Hindus.

Mīrābāī's life shows that a true Bhakta does not see any difference between man and woman, poor and rich, low caste and high caste, and respects them equally. And Bhagavān too protects his Bhaktas, just like he had protected Mīrābāī.



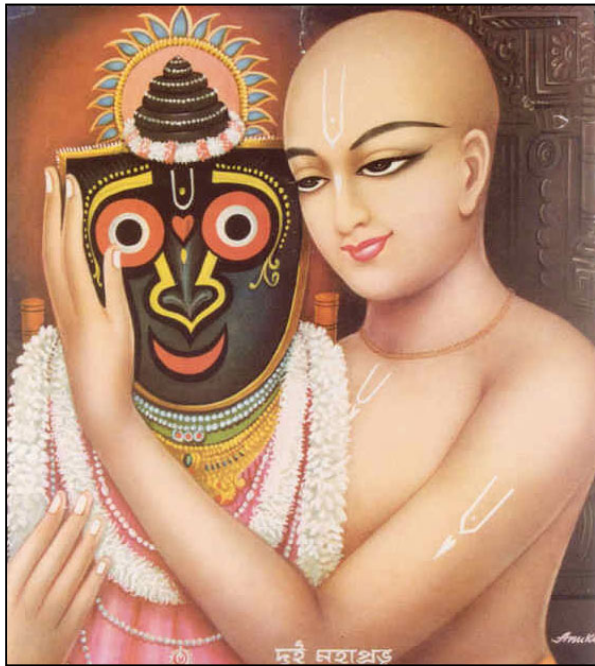
15.4 Angad Singh: From the feet of his King, to the Feet of Lord Vishnu

In the 15th cent. CE, the King of Raisen had a brave military commander named Angad Singh. The latter's wife was a very virtuous woman, who served her dutifully and was also a great devotee of Bhagavan Vishnu. She had a Guru, whom she served dutifully and whose spiritual guidance she followed with diligence.

Angad had no faith in Bhagavan. One day, he returned from hunting and saw his wife listening to a pravachana being given by her Guru. Being tired, he became angry and abused the Guru. Then, he scolded his wife for being a foolish woman who chased useless men like her Guru. The Guru did not feel offended. He merely said to the lady, "Forgive your husband, because he does not know that Vishnu alone was the source of all happiness in this world." The Guru then left for his own home.

And yet, the wife was very hurt at her husband's behavior and stopped eating her food. After her fourth day of fasting, Angad became a bit concerned at the deteriorating health of his wife. He asked her for forgiveness. She replied, "If you want me to live, then you will need to transform yourself completely. I want that henceforth, you should you're your life with Bhakti towards Hari. After many rebirths does one get the human body. It is through this body alone that we can strive towards Moksha and reach Hari. And yet, most humans spend their entire lives chasing the mirage of worldly pleasures. They do not realize that only Hari can give them true and everlasting happiness. For the sake of the so-called happiness, ignorant people eat meat, drink alcohol and harm other creatures in different ways. They do not understand that this human body is actually meant to take the soul towards Hari. Minute my minute, day by day, time passes by. Death can come any moment. And yet, foolish men waste their lives by forgetting Hari. When they finally understand that we should focus our lives on Hari, it is sometimes too late. Therefore my dear husband, do not waste a single moment, and start living the life of a true Bhakta."

The words of his beloved wife had a great impact on Angad's heart. He was now a changed man. He started devoting all his free time to singing the praises of Hari, in reading scriptures and in serving Sants and other Bhaktas. He thanked his wife for being his Guru, and for making him leave a life of evil.



One day, the Sultan of Delhi invaded the kingdom of Raisen. Angad was asked to lead the military forces and face the enemy. Angad was successful in making the enemy flee, leaving behind their wealth, and even the gem studded crown of the Sultan.

Angad took possession of all the treasures that the enemy had left. He noticed that the royal crown had a very large diamond. He thought, "This will make a perfect gift to Bhagavan Jagannatha at Puri!"

And so, he kept the diamond with himself, and sent the rest of the captured treasures to the King of Raisen. But when the King heard that Angad had kept the diamond with himself, he sent his soldiers to fetch it for his own treasury. Angad refused, saying that the best of our possessions must always be reserved for offering to Hari.

The King was furious to hear Angad's reply. He ordered his soldiers to capture Angad and take the diamond away from him forcibly. Angad ran for his safety on a horseback. But soon, he was cornered at the bank of the river. Seeing no way to escape, he threw the diamond into the river with the prayer, "Bhagavan Jagannatha, I give this precious gem to you as my humble offering."

The soldiers captured Angad and hauled him to the royal court. The King was annoyed to learn what Angad had done. But keeping in mind his past services, the King forgave him.

Meanwhile, in the Jagannātha Mandir, a diamond appeared on the navel of the Mūrti. The Mūrti spoke to the priest miraculously, "My dear Bhakta Angad has gifted me this diamond with great faith. Please go and bring him here in my presence." The priest obeyed the command, and his followers finally found Angad after three months of search. He fell at his feet, and requested him to accompany them to the Mandir, saying that Bhagavān Jagannātha had Himself accepted his gift, and wanted him to come to Puri.

When Angad reached the Mandir, the priest and numerous Bhaktas came to welcome him. As Angad entered the Mandir, the Mūrti spoke again, "My dear Bhakta, you have truly given up your earlier ways, and have become my

true Bhakta under the influence of your wife. Most people in this world would not want to part with a precious diamond, but you gave it to me with great faith. I am like a fisherman, and this world is like a net. When a fisherman throws a net, which is open in his feet's direction, the fish which try to run away from the fisherman's feet get caught in the net. On the other hand, the fish which try to come closer to the feet of the fisherman are saved. In a similar way, those who seek refuge with Me are saved from the sorrows of this world, but those who look away from me get caught in these sorrows. And who are those Bhaktas that look towards my feet? They are the ones who take care of orphans and give charity to the Brahmanas, the Sants and other needy people. They do good deeds, and are not stingy in giving away their wealth. And they do all this only out of love for Me. Angad, you have turned away from the net of this world, and have taken refuge in my feet. Therefore, I consider you as my true Bhakta."

When the King of Raisen heard all about Jagannātha's appearance before Angad, he regretted his greed. He asked Angad for forgiveness, and requested him to return to his home. The King also donated five villages to Angad so that he could live comfortably the rest of his life, and devote himself towards Bhakti

15.5 Raskhan, the Gay Muslim who fell in Love with Krishna

A beautiful story is narrated in Vaishnava hagiographies about Sant Raskhan, a Muslim Pathan who was born close to the town of Amroha in Uttar Pradesh in northern India in 1548 CE. His original name was Sayyad Ibrahim. He had homosexual leanings, and was infatuated with a Baniyā (trader) Hindu boy. Some Vaishnavas discussed amongst themselves, "If he can fall so deeply in love with a human being, how wonderful it would be if he were to fall in love with Krishna, the most handsome one? Falling in love with Bhagavān would lead Raskhan to Moksha, whereas falling in love with a human being will not take him anywhere." They conspired with a local vendor who sold 'paan' (betel leaves wrapped around some condiments) to divert Raskhan towards a love for Krishna.



When Raskhan went to buy a paan from the vendor, the latter wrapped it in a piece of paper and gave it to his customer. When Raskhan unwrapped the paan, he was pleasantly surprised to see the picture of the handsome Bhagavan Krishna. He asked the vendor whose picture it was. The vendor said, 'Don't you know of Krishna, our Lord, and the most handsome One. His murtis are in temples in Vrindavan.'

Raskhan decided to buy a green shawl and take it as a present for Krishna to the temple in Vrindavan. But, the priests stopped him at the entrance and said, "You cannot enter the Mandir, and we will also not accept your offering because this is a Hindu shrine, and you are a Muslim. Moreover, it is afternoon and the Mandir will be closed for the Lord to take his siesta. Please go away."

Disappointed, Raskhan went away. After a few hours, when the priests unlocked the Mandir, they were shocked to see a green shawl wrapped around the shoulders of Krishna's murti, even though they had refused to accept that as a gift from Raskhan. The priests interpreted the miracle to mean that Raskhan was a true Bhakta of Krishna, and the Lord had Himself accepted the gift from the Muslim Bhakta. The priests went in search of Raskhan and found him singing bhajans in praise of Krishna on the banks of the Yamuna River nearby.



Raskhan was honored by the Vaishnavas of Vrindavan, and he chose to settle down in that area. For the rest of his life, he composed numerous verses in praise of Krishna. He also translated the Bhagavata Purana into Persian, and also wrote verses in praise of Shiva and Durga. When he died, he was given a respectable funeral by the Vaishnava Hindus. The site of his funeral is marked by a monument that is still visited for pilgrimage by Hindus today.

The example of Raskhan showed how his pure love and devotion was accepted by Krishna, although Raskhan was a homosexual. And the Hindu tradition acknowledges this fact,

and regards Raskhan as a Hindu Vaishnava saint, whose songs are sung reverentially by Hindus to the present day.

15.6 Goswāmī Lāl Jī, the Orphan who was adopted by Krishna

Goswāmī Lāl Jī was born to Brahmin parents in Sehwan in Sindh (Pakistan) in the year 1551 CE. His childhood name was Tulsidās. At a very young age, his parents passed away. He travelled for two years till he reached Vrindavan, the town where Krishna had spent his childhood. Krishna appeared to him in a dream and asked him to go to Mathura where he was born. At Mathurā, Sant Vitthal Nāth, the second son of Vallabhāchārya adopted him. Tulsidas was assigned the duty of carrying water to Shri Nāthjī Mandir every day. Out of love, Vitthal Nāth referred to his adopted son as ‘Lāl’ (meaning ‘dear son’) and that is how he was called later on.

After a few years, Sant Vitthal Nāth gave seven Krishna mūrtis to his family members and asked them to construct seven Mandirs to worship Krishna. He gave the eighth mūrti (called ‘Gopināth jī’) to Lāl jī and asked him to spread the worship of Krishna in northwest India (today the country of Pakistan). He taught him the correct way of worshipping the mūrti and declared that Lāl jī was now ‘Goswāmī Lāl Jī, eighth of the eight leaders of the tradition of Vallabhāchārya. For over two years, Lāl jī took the mūrti to various towns of northern Pakistan till he was tired. But he felt that Krishna was not pleased with any of those locations. Finally, he prayed to Krishna and said, “I have been worshipping you and carrying you for two years. But now I am tired. Please settle down in one place that you like, and I will construct a Mandir for you at that place.” Krishna appeared to him in a dream and said, “If you are tired, place me down and I will follow you. You can be sure that I am following you from the sound of my anklets.”



After a long journey, they reached the broad river Indus. Goswāmī Lāl Jī crossed the Indus with the mūrti on a boat and landed on the west shore. He placed the mūrti on the ground but after sometime, he could not hear the anklets. Therefore, Goswāmī Lāl Jī assumed that Krishna wanted to stay in that location. The place was called Dera Ghazi Khan, and was ruled by a Muslim king of the Baloch tribe. He reached a fruit orchard owned by a Hindu merchant and placed the mūrti under a tree. Worship of the mūrti started and people

started showing up in large numbers.

The merchant was upset that Goswāmī Lāl Jī had encroached upon his private property and asked him to leave the place and take his mūrti with him. But when Goswāmī Lāl Jī followed his orders, the merchant suddenly experienced a sharp pain in his stomach. No physician was able to cure the pain. Finally, the merchant went and

apologized to Krishna and Goswāmī Lāl Jī and asked them to return to his orchard. As soon as they returned to that tree, the merchant's pain disappeared. When the local Muslim ruler, who was childless, heard of the miracle, he too came to Goswāmī Lāl Jī and asked him to pray to Krishna, so that the ruler could become a father. After a few months, a baby boy was born to the ruler.

The Hindu merchant and the Baloch Muslim ruler donated a large amount of money which was used by Goswāmī Lāl Jī to construct a beautiful Mandir in Dera Ghazi Khan in 1586 CE. Goswāmī Lāl Jī settled down in Dera Ghazi Khan. His children and grandchildren were born there. One of the famous grandsons of Goswāmī Lāl Jī was Sant Kewal Rām. In 1947, when the country of Pakistan was carved out of India, all the Hindus of Pakistan were expelled. The Hindus of Dera Ghazi Khan brought the mūrti from their temple and constructed a new temple for it in Vrindavan.

15.7 Sati Kewal Rām

Sant Kewal Rām was born in 1617 CE in Dera Ghazi Khan. He was a very religious child. When his father Goswāmī Mathurā Nāth passed away, Sant Kewal Rām decided to roam all over Pakistan and Afghanistan to stop the conversion of Hindus to Islam. The ruler of Afghanistan was furious and ordered his soldier's to arrest Sant Kewal Rām. When the soldiers came to arrest the Sant, he was sitting on a wall. He asked them to return to their King's palace and that he will follow them. As they started on horseback, Sant Kewal Rām showed a miracle. The wall on which he was sitting started following the horses and soon overtook them! When the ruler heard of this miracle, he was terrified and gave a big donation to the Sant, who passed it on to the Mandir in Dera Ghazi Khan. The forcible conversion of Hindus was stopped in the area, thanks to the miracle of the Sant.

After a few years, Sant Kewal Rām decided to settle down a little north of Dera Ghazi Khan. This new home was in an area called Dera Ismail Khan and was also located west of the river Indus. There, he erected a platform on which he sat and regularly gave talks on Hindu Dharma (and specifically the teachings of Vallabhāchārya). Many Muslim saints lived in that area and they opposed Sant Kewal Rām's arrival. One day, a Muslim saint spread a cloth on the Indus river and floated on it as if the cloth were a boat. He challenged Sant Kewal Rām to repeat the miracle. The Sant bested the Muslim saint by throwing a rock into the Indus and then float on it as if the rock were a boat. Another Muslim saint once threw a snake at him. The Sant converted the snake into a stone.

One day, Sant Kewal Rām was travelling on the Indus river, using a piece of cloth as a boat. A Muslim saint was watching him with his head out of a window in his home. The Muslim saint performed some magic so that the Sant would drown. When the Sant realized that he was drowning, he performed some counter magic so that the Muslim saint grew horns and his chin enlarged so that his face got stuck in the window. The Sant then forgave the Muslim saint and asked him not to ever misuse his magical powers.



Local Muslims still visit the platform of Sant Kewal Rām in Dera Ismail Khan and light a lamp in his honor. The platform is now taken care of by Muslim caretakers. A photograph of this platform is shown below.



Did you know: The beautiful life of Krishna inspired not just Hindu Sants, but also many others who were born as Muslims. These Muslims became devotees of Krishna and wrote beautiful poetry to worship Him. Examples of these Sants include a temple doorkeeper Sultan of Jaipur (Rajasthan, India) and Raskhan (Delhi, India). Today, Hindus regard them as Hindu Sants, and sing Raskhan’s devotional poetry.

15.8 Sultān, the Muslim boy devoted to Krishna

The King of Jaipur appointed Sultan, a Muslim boy, to guard the Krishna Mandir in the city. Seeing the prayers of visiting Bhaktas, Sultan too became a devotee. Krishna saw that the heart of Sultan was pure, and that his devotion was true. Therefore, one night as Sultan was guarding the locked Mandir from outside, Krishna appeared with Radha and several Gopis and danced in front of Sultan, just as they did the Rasleela dance in Vrindavana thousands of years earlier.

The innocent Sultan saw them dance for hours and thought, “If Bhagavān does not stop dancing, He will get tired!” In the morning, the priests came to sing the morning chants in front of the Mūrti to wake up the Bhagavān. But Sultan stopped them at the entrance saying, “Do not wake up Krishna. He must be tired because he did the Rāsleelā the whole night.”

The priests did not believe him. They said, “How can you



stop us from doing our duty? What proof do you have that you saw Krishna, Radha and the Gopis dance?” Sultan said, “While Radha was dancing, her anklet fell off. I picked it up.” The priests examined the anklet. Then they unlocked the temple and went inside and saw that one of the two anklets in the Mūrti of Radha was missing!

After several other incidents, the people of the city realized that Sultan, despite being a Muslim, was a true Bhakta of Krishna. His fame spread, and many pilgrims and Bhaktas came from a long distance to see him as well while coming to worship at the Mandir. It is said that one day, Sultan’s soul too merged with Bhagavān Krishna.

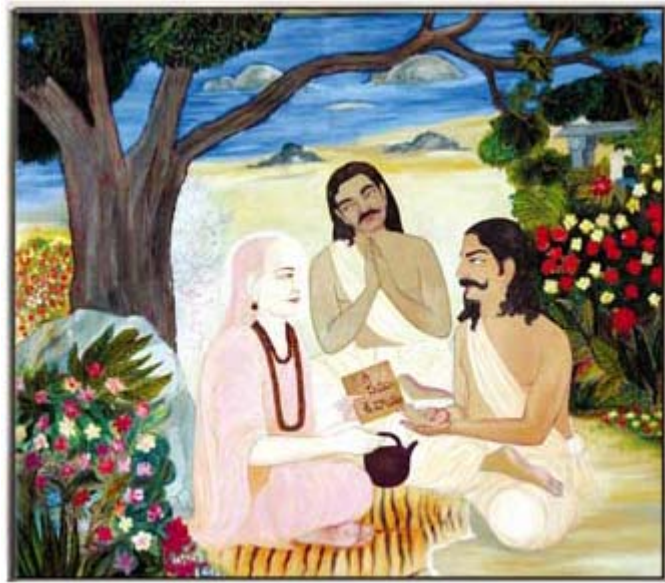
16. Brave Hindu Kings of Medieval & Modern Period

16.1 The Emperors of Vijayanagara

In the 14th century CE, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the Muslim Sultan of Delhi, invaded south India, he smashed several temples (replacing them with mosques), massacred Hindus and did several other atrocities against Hindus. In one of these campaigns, he captured the fort of Kumata. The chief Ramanatha died in the battle and all the ladies committed Jauhar – an act of suicide to prevent capture and dishonor by the enemy. Other residents of the fort, including the brothers Harihara and Bukka were captured, and were taken to Delhi to be converted to Islam.

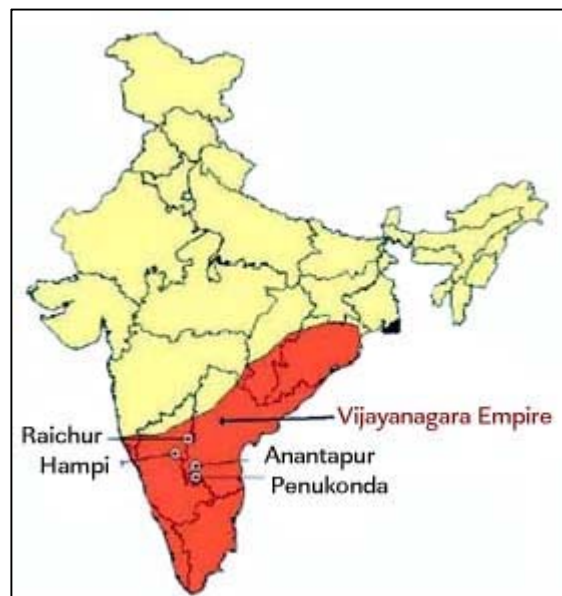
The Hindus remaining in that region soon rose in rebellion. This forced Tughlaq to depend on the two converted brothers, who had belonged to the ruling class of that region. He made them administer oaths of loyalty

and sent them South to curb the revolts and rule the region under his name. However, when the brothers reached their native region, an influential Hindu monk Swami Vidyāraṇya inspired them to convert back to Hindu Dharma. Now, there was an uprising of Hindus in the region and Harihara and Bukka attained the role of leaders of Hindus. Guided by the Swami and his scholarly brothers Sayana and Mayana, Harihara and Bukkarāya established a Hindu kingdom in that area. Soon, the brothers defeated neighboring chiefs and founded an Empire that came to be known as the Vijayanagara Empire. This Empire lasted for over two centuries. This period led to a revival of Hindu Dharma in South India, and prevented it from becoming destroyed. While the Empire lasted, dozens of Hindu scholars and saints arose in the region, and they wrote thousands of explanations on Hindu



scriptures, devotional hymns to Hindu Devatas and several temples were constructed across the region. During the reigns of Harihara, Bukka and their successors, their minister Sāyaṇa and his brother Mādhava collected a large team of scholars from South India and they wrote massive explanations of the Vedas and books on many other aspects of Hindu Dharma. Due to their hard work, we can understand these scriptures very well. When the Vedas were first published, studied and translated by the European and Indian scholars in the 19th century, they used the commentaries by Sāyaṇa as a starting point.

The Kings of this empire constructed several new temples or added on to older temples. The Muslim Sultan of Madurai in Tamil Nadu had banned Hindu worship and customs. His ministers and military officers also slaughtered cows to offend the Hindus. Bukka waged several battles with the Sultan, and eventually destroyed his kingdom, making it a part of the Vijayanagar empire. Once again, Hindus could worship in freedom in Southern India and Hindu worship was resumed in the temples of Srirangam and other places. The atrocities of the Sultan on Hindus, and the conquest of Madurai is described in a beautiful poetic work called



‘Madhurāvijaya’ written by Gangādevī, who was the daughter in law of Bukka. In the next few centuries, numerous Hindu Saints arose in or migrated to the empire. Their devotional writings are studied with great respect even today.

The Vijayanagara rulers respected all religions. Once, after the death of Harihara, when Bukkarāya was the king, a fight broke out between the Hindu Vaishnavas (worshippers of Vishnu), who were in a majority, and the minority Jains. It was expected that the king would take the side of Vaishnavas. But Swami Vidyāranya instructed the king to act with fairness and deal with people of all traditions with equal eye. In fact, respect for all religions is a Hindu practice, and the kingdom of Vijayanagar too gave equal protection and respect to all religious traditions including Islam. King Bukka summoned leaders of both the communities, and asked them to forget their enmity. He declared that in his eyes, all religions are equal and that he will not favor one religion over another, even though he was himself a Hindu.

The rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire constructed their capital at a place called Hampi, which is said to be the birthplace of Hanuman, and is also where Shabari of Ramayana used to live. Hampi became one of the largest and grandest cities in the world. Traders from all over the world stopped at Hampi, brought articles of luxury like precious gems, horses and fine clothing.



One of the greatest Emperors of Vijayanagara was King Krishna Deva Rāya, who ruled from 1509 – 1529 CE. Under his reign, Hampi became a great city, and many new temples were constructed or enlarged (e.g. the Tirupati and Srisaillam temples). Krishna Deva Rāya was a great scholar who is himself said to have authored at least one book on the duties of a good king. One of the eight great poets that he supported financially was the witty Tenali Raman, about whom you will read later. Even today, Hindus fondly remember the rule of Krishna Deva Rāya with great pride.

Although the Vijayanagar Empire was destroyed after the battle of Talikota in 1565 CE, the work done by its kings and scholars and saints for over 300 years ensured that Hindu traditions lived on till our times despite attacks by fanatics of other religions. From the lives of the Kings and Saints of Vijayanagar, we must learn to be ready to defend our Dharma whenever needed, so that we can continue to practice our culture and traditions without fear, and can pass them on to our children.

16.2 Mahārāṇā Pratāp, the Lion of Mewār (Ruler from 1572 – 1597 CE)

In 1556CE, at the age of 13 years, Akbar became the third Moghul Emperor of India. He ruled much of Northern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan for 49 years. In his long reign, he invaded and defeated numerous Hindu and Muslim kings of the region and kept enlarging his Empire. Two Hindu kingdoms that staunchly resisted his invasion were Mewār in Western India, and Gondwana in Eastern and Central India. The latter was ruled

by the brave warrior queen Rani Durgāvatī. The Hindu resistance in Mewār was led by the Rajput King Mahārāṇā Pratāp. Even to this day, the people of that area sing poems in praise of the Mahārāṇā and his famed horse – Chetak. It is said that Pratāp was so powerful that with a single stroke of his sword, he could slice into half an enemy soldier and also his horse!



Udai Singh, Mahārāṇā Pratāp's father, had to leave their capital Chittor and hide in nearby mountains when Akbar's army invaded several times. Finally in 1568CE, Akbar occupied the fort of Chittor and slaughtered 30,000 Hindu farmers of the area in cold blood. All the Hindu women in the fort committed suicide by immolating themselves and the Rajput soldiers fought till their death. A few years later, Udai Singh died, and Pratāp became Mewār's new Mahārāṇā (the title of the king of Mewār). Akbar sent several

messengers to Mahārāṇā Pratāp, asking him to acknowledge Akbar as his ruler. But each time, Mahārāṇā Pratāp replied, "We Rājput̥s will never accept a foreigner as our ruler."

Angered, Akbar sent a huge army to capture and kill Mahārāṇā Pratāp. This famous battle is known as the battle of Haldighatī, because the soil of the valley (ghatī) in which it was fought was yellow as haldī (turmeric). Unfortunately, Mahārāṇā Pratāp was injured while fighting. One of his loyal commanders quickly took his helmet to fool the Moghul soldiers, while Chetak, the horse of Mahārāṇā Pratāp took his wounded master away from the battlefield. The Moghul soldiers killed the commander wearing the royal helmet thinking him to be Mahārāṇā Pratāp. This gave Chetak some time to flee from the battlefield. When the Moghul soldiers realized their mistake, they tracked down Chetak and Mahārāṇā Pratāp and started chasing them. Unfortunately, a wide and deep ravine lay ahead of Chetak. It was sure that the Moghul soldiers would soon corner them and Mahārāṇā Pratāp would be captured. But as the Moghul soldiers looked in amazement, Chetak took a giant leap across the ravine and landed at the other side of the ravine. None of the Moghul horses could jump that far. But at the other side of the ravine, Chetak died, as he sustained a fatal injury due to the giant leap. Mahārāṇā Pratāp wept at the death of his beloved horse.



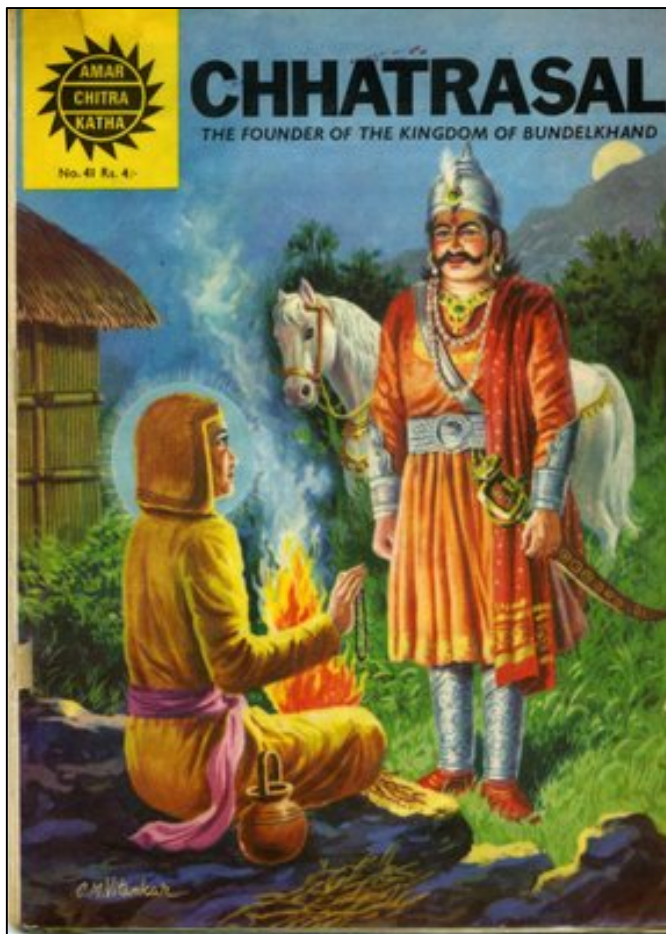
Now, Mahārāṇā Pratāp and his family had to hide in the jungles of the region to avoid capture. They had nothing to eat, except grass and wild berries. Luckily, the chief of the Bheel tribals of those forests came to the royal family's rescue and offered all the tribal men as soldiers who would fight the war on the side of Mewār. Bhāmāshāh, a rich merchant of Mewār also came to Mahārāṇā Pratāp and donated his entire wealth, so that his king could buy weapons, food and horses to prepare for his war against the Moghul Empire.

Mahārāṇā Pratāp was greatly moved by the patriotism of the Bheel Chief and the merchant. They trained an army of Bheel tribals, and many other patriotic Rājputrs joined the cause of Mewār.

One after another, Mahārāṇā Pratāp was able to recapture the forts of his kingdom back from the Moghuls. Even though Mewār was a very small kingdom compared to the mighty Moghul Empire, Mahārāṇā Pratāp was able to defeat the Moghul armies several times due to his bravery and military skills. Unfortunately, he died before he could recapture Chittor. Nevertheless, his bravery, patriotism and pride was praised even by Emperor Akbar, and continues to inspire the Hindus even today.

Did you know? When India obtained independence in 1947 from the British rule, about a third of the country was ruled by Kings and Princes. They were all asked to sign a document stating that henceforth, their kingdom would become a part of India. The first King to receive the document for his signature was the King of Mewār. In 1950, independent India adopted a new constitution and a grand procession was taken out in New Delhi on 26 January 1950 to celebrate the event. The procession was led by an elephant that was sent by the ruler of Mewār. Both these incidents show that the Government of India held the kings of Mewār in great respect because they always fought for their freedom from foreign rule throughout history even though they had to suffer much. Mahārāṇā Pratāp could have easily accepted Akbar as his ruler and lived the rest of his life in luxury. But instead, he chose a hard life in forest because he valued the freedom of his country and self-respect more than the comforts of own life.

15.3 King Chhatrasāl (1649 – 1731 CE) and his Guru Mahāmati Prāṇ Nāth (1618 – 1694 CE)



Chhatrasāl (1649 – 1731 CE) is considered as the founder of the Hindu kingdom of Bundelkhand during the reign of the bigoted Muslim ruler Aurangzeb. His kingdom provided one more refuge for non-Muslims in India, and led to the construction of numerous beautiful temples, revival of Hindu religious learning and patronage of Hindu saints. Amazingly, Chhatrasāl started his revolt against the Moghul rule at the age of 22 with the help of just 5 horsemen and 25 soldiers!

Chhatrasāl was the son of a Hindu chief Raja Champat Rāi and Rani Lāl Kunwar. He showed great signs of bravery even as a teenager. Once, his entire family was on their way to the Vindhyāvāsini Devī temple in central India. The 13 year old Chhatrasāl was ahead of his family. When he reached fairly close to the Mandir, he met several Muslim Pathans, who asked him for the location of the Mandir.

Chhatrasāl asked, “Have you come to get a Darshan of the Devi?” The Pathans laughed, “What a fool! We have come to destroy the temple and break the Mūrti worshipped by you Hindus.” Chhatrasāl became very angry and challenged them to a fight. The Pathans mocked him saying, “You are but a teenager. Better scamper off and save your life.”

But Chhatrasāl could not be scared. A sword fight ensued, and the 13 year old Chhatrasāl single

handedly killed all the Pathans. His act of bravery saved the Hindu mandir from destruction. When Chhatrasāl grew up, he decided to stop Aurangzeb's policy of religious persecution of Hindus. He found an able guide in a Hindu Sannyasin named Prāṇ Nāth, who was from Gujarat.

Swami Prāṇ Nāth believed that all humans had the right to practice their religion freely and therefore, it was wrong on the part of Emperor Aurangzeb to convert Hindus to Islam using force. With his followers, he tried a lot to arrange a meeting with Aurangzeb and convince him. But the Moghul Emperor kept him waiting for six months, and then did not meet him at all! Prāṇ Nāth then decided to find a brave Hindu warrior who could defeat Aurangzeb, and establish a kingdom where Hindus could practice their faith with full freedom. He found such a man in Prince Chhatrasāl. But, Chhatrasāl had no money or weapons to wage a war against the mighty Moghul Empire. It is said that Swami Prāṇ Nāth took Chhatrasāl to a location called Pannā, and tapped his stick there several times, indicating that Chhatrasāl should have his men dig the ground at that spot.

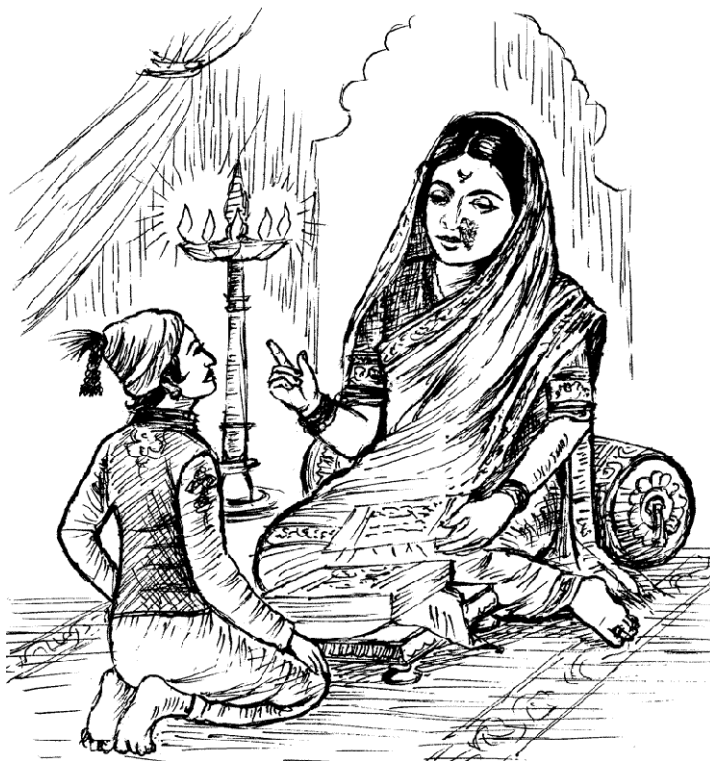
Miraculously, diamonds were discovered underneath the ground at Pannā. These diamond mines in fact continued to yield diamonds till recently. They are now exhausted. Through the sale of these diamonds, Prince Chhatrasāl was able to buy weapons and pay the salaries of his army of soldiers. Guided by his spiritual Guru Swami Prāṇ Nāth, he created the kingdom of Bundelkhand in which Hindus could heave a sigh of relief.

Mahāmati Prāṇ Nāth wrote several scriptures in many languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Sindhi etc.) which were collected into a single volume called the Kulzām Swarūp. In these writings, the Saint says that although the Hindu Dharma is the best of all religions, we must not insult other religions, and each human being must be free to follow his or her choice of religion. Today, this Saint's followers are still found in large numbers in India and in Nepal, and they visit the Samādhi (where the Saint's funeral was carried out) in Pannā.

16.4 Chhatrapati Shivaji and his Guru Swami Samartha Rāmadāsa

After Aurangzeb became the sixth Mughal Emperor of India in 1658 CE, he started persecuting the Hindus, who were over 80% of the population of the Indian subcontinent. He broke numerous temples, slaughtered cows and Brahmanas, forcibly converted thousands, prohibited public celebration of Hindu festivals, indulged in burning of Hindu scriptures, imposed taxes like the temple entry tax, the pilgrimage tax and the Jaziya on the Hindus, fired Hindu

employees from administration and so on. As a result, groups of Hindus rose in revolt. In peninsular India, Hindu revolts were led by Chhatrapati Shivaji, who rallied the brave Maratha warriors and started freeing territory that was under the rule of Aurangzeb. Among other teachers, Shivaji was also guided by the Hindu Saint Swami Samartha Rāmadāsa.



his mother and Dada Kondadev.

The childhood of Shivaji: Shivaji was born to Shahaji Bhonsale and Jijabai. Shahaji served the Muslim rulers of western India. When Shivaji was still a child, Shahaji sent him with his mother and a learned Brahmin named Dadaji Kondadev to Pune. Shivaji heard the stories of the brave heroes of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as he grew up from his mother, and Dada Kondadev.

Jijabai was pained that most of India was ruled by Muslim rulers who frequently insulted the religion of the Hindus. She did not like the fact that her own husband served one of them – the Sultan of Bijapur. Therefore she taught Shivaji that he must be patriotic and free the land from their rule one day. Shivaji took to his heart the teachings of

Shivaji creates a Hindu Kingdom and kills Afzal Khan:



He gathered a group of Maratha Hindu boys and together, they started training for military battles. Soon, Shivaji and his soldiers captured the fort of Torana. When the Sultan of Bijapur heard the news, he sent his seven foot tall general named Afzal Khan to capture Shivaji. Afzal Khan arrived with a large force. On his way to Pune, he demolished many Hindu temples and killed innocent people. Shivaji sent him a message, "You are like a father to me. I want to come and meet with you to offer my respects. But my condition is that both of us will come to meet without our armies. Only two body-guards will come with each of us. Afzal Khan thought that this was a good opportunity to kill Shivaji, who was a very small man compared to him.

When Shivaji met Afzal Khan, he came forward to give a hug to Shivaji in a fake show of love. In reality, he had a dagger in the arm that went behind Shivaji's back, and wanted to stab Shivaji to death. But Shivaji was smarter. He had come with an armor jacket hidden under his clothing. Moreover, on his fingers, he wore metal claws. Afzal Khan's dagger could not pierce Shivaji's back,

but Shivaji dug his metal claws into Afzal Khan's stomach and killed him. Shivaji's body-guards were expert swordsmen and they killed Afzal Khan's guards.

Shivaji injures Shaista Khan:

After this success, Shivaji and his soldiers captured one fort after another in Western India. The common man in Shivaji's kingdom was very happy, and Hindus were able to practice their religion peacefully once more. But, Shivaji needed money to run his kingdom. Therefore, he attacked and looted the Indian



port of Surat, which was a part of the mighty Mughal empire of Aurangzeb. Shivaji took care that the common citizens of Surat were not harmed during his raid. Emperor Aurangzeb was furious at the news, and he sent a huge army under his uncle Shaista Khan to kill Shivaji. Shaista Khan easily captured Pune, and occupied the palace of Shivaji while he was away.

Shivaji thought of a plan. He and his soldiers dressed as members of a wedding procession which then passed outside Shivaji's palace. They slipped into the palace, shocking Shaista Khan, who tried to escape in the confusion. However, Shivaji cut his fingers as Shaista Khan fled from the palace, leaving his guards and family behind. When Shaista Khan

reached the court of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor was furious at Shivaji's boldness.

This time, he sent a mighty army under the leadership of a Rajput Hindu ruler named Jai Singh. Shivaji wrote a letter to Jai Singh shaming him for serving a Muslim ruler who insulted Hindu Dharma, the faith of Jai Singh. But, the Rajput chief did not listen and the army led by him defeated Shivaji and captured him. Shivaji was produced before Aurangzeb in his court, but the Emperor ignored him. Shivaji insulted Aurangzeb in front of everyone, as a result of which, Aurangzeb put him under house arrest in the city of Agra.

Shivaji escapes from Aurangzeb's arrest:

While under house-arrest, Shivaji pretended that he had fallen sick. He expressed a wish to send large baskets of gifts to Hindu holy men to get their blessings. Every day, as the baskets left Shivaji's home, the Mughal guards inspected them carefully, but they found only sweets, flowers, clothing and similar gifts for the Brahmins. After a while, they stopped checking the baskets.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Shivaji and his son hid themselves in the baskets one day and slipped out! At a distance, a supporter of Shivaji waited with clothes and horses. Shivaji, his son and the supporter disguised themselves as wandering Sadhus. They traveled from one place to another in this disguise to prevent being arrested by Aurangzeb's soliders.



Shivaji crowned as a Hindu Emperor:

Finally, after roaming through central India, Shivaji reached Rajgarh and surprised his mother. Preparations were made to crown him as a Hindu Emperor. However, as Shivaji was from a humble family, some close-minded Pandits refused to bless him. Thereupon, the Hindu king of Udaipur declared Shivaji as his adopted son, and a learned Brahmin from Varanasi agreed to perform the ceremonies to crown Shivaji as a Hindu emperor.

All over India, Hindus were filled with pride. Now, they could look up to a leader who would free them from the harsh rule of Aurangzeb. One by one, Shivaji set about capturing the forts of Aurangzeb in Western and Southern India. But, his struggle was not very easy because the Mughal army was much larger than his. A story below is sometimes told of how Shivaji developed a successful strategy to defeat Aurangzeb.



How Shivaji captured the forts of Emperor Aurangzeb:

Initially, Shivaji had great difficulty in capturing the forts held by Aurangzeb. One day, after a war, he was passing through a jungle, hungry, tired and separated from his soldiers. He came across a hut, and requested the old lady inside it for some food. The lady thought him to be a soldier in Shivaji's army. She quickly served him some steaming hot food.

Shivaji was very hungry and he immediately plunged his fingers into the middle of the food pile and gulped it down. In doing so, he burned both his fingers and his mouth. The old lady remarked amusingly, "You too are foolish like Shivaji!"

Startled, Shivaji asked, "Dear Mother, please explain why you think of Shivaji as foolish?" The lady replied, "Look at you – instead of trying to nibble at cooler food at the edges, you plunged straight into the center of the hot pile of food. Similarly, Shivaji attacks big forts at the center of the Empire of Aurangzeb, and then gets defeated and suffers heavy losses every now and then. Instead, he should attack the small forts in the border areas of the Moghul empire and capture them one by one. This way, he will constantly increase his strength, and can then easily capture the bigger forts at the center."

Shivaji admired the intelligence of his host. He adopted her strategy and as a result, he was able to establish a large kingdom before he died.

Shivaji's respect for Enemy's Women



During the Muslim rule in India, the rulers and chiefs frequently kidnapped beautiful Hindu women for their use. Shivaji started liberating the Western parts of India from the Moghul Empire and established a just Hindu rule.

Some of his soldiers captured the beautiful daughter of the Amir of the town of Kalyan, and presented her to Shivaji. They thought that Shivaji would get even with the Muslims and force her into become his bride.

But Shivaji looked at the terrified lady and then commented, "If my mother were as beautiful as

her, I too would have been a handsome man. I order that she be returned to her family with full honors."

Hanuman Bhakta Swami Samartha Rāmadāsa, the Guru of Maharaja Shivaji



In the sixteenth century, there lived a Saint named Swami Samartha Rāmadāsa. He was a great Bhakta of Hanuman. One day, as a child, when he heard how Hanuman had jumped across the ocean, he became very excited. He went to the shore of the river close to his home. Then he shouted, 'Jai Hanuman' and tried to jump across the river. But he was just a child. Instead of landing on the other side of the river, he bumped his head on a rock. He got a big bump on his forehead, which remained all his life.

But Samartha Rāmadāsa never gave up his Bhakti towards Hanuman. He set up hundreds of centers in western India to train Hindus in martial arts. He asked Hindu youngsters to exercise, eat well and have a disciplined life so that they too could become strong like Hanuman. Some of the exercise gymnasiums founded by Swami Samartha Rāmadāsa exist even today.

One of the Swami's students was Shivaji. Partly with the help of Samartha Rāmadāsa, Shivaji was able to raise an army of strong and fit warriors. This army fought the evil Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who had caused a lot of problems for the Hindus of India.

The Guru of Emperor Shivaji apologizes for his mistake: In Shivaji's days, there was no internet,

newspaper, television or camera. Therefore, people did not know how Swami Samarth Ramdas looked like.

Once, Swami Samarth Ramdas was touring the country with his other students when they all felt hungry. His disciples went to a farmer's field and cut out a few cobs of the jowar (a grain called 'sorghum' in English) for their food. When the farmers of that village saw them, they gathered and started beating all of them.

When Shivaji got the news, he became very angry and asked his Guru as to what punishment should be given to the farmers. The Guru replied, "Do not give them any punishment. Instead honor them with a gift because they rightly punished us for stealing food. They perhaps knew that I am your Guru, but that did not scare them from beating us. It was certainly the fault of my students that they went into a field uninvited and stole the cobs of jowar."

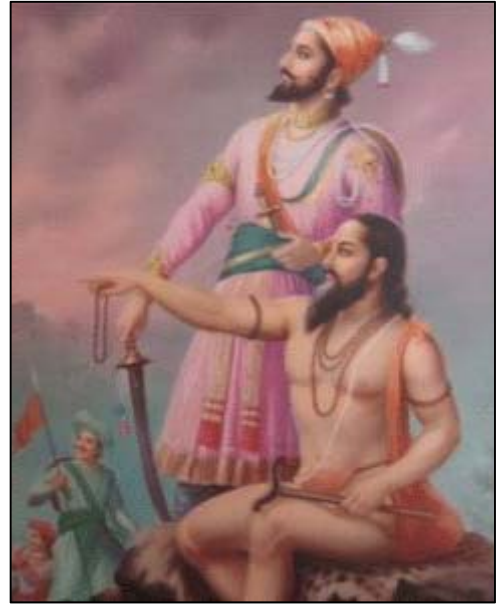
Shivaji is prevented from becoming a Sannyasi by Samartha Rāmadāsa:

Shivaji was not just a brave Hindu warrior, but also a very spiritual person. The following story is narrated regarding a meeting the Shivaji had with the saint at the Jārāndā Hill:

"The next morning, as he was getting ready to leave, he heard that Shivaji was waiting to see him at the temple. Ramadasa came there, gave his usual call. 'Jaya Jaya Raghuvīra Samartha', and then held out his begging bag to the prince to be filled. Shivaji reverently saluted his guru and put a note in Ramadasa's begging bag. After talking for a while, Ramadasa took the note out of the bag and read it. The note said, 'The whole kingdom is given as a gift to Sadguru Maharaj.' Ramadasa then remarked: 'Well, Shivaba, the kingdom is now mine. Very good. What are you going to do in the future?'

'I shall spend my time in serving you', replied Shivaji. 'Excellent', said Ramadasa. 'Let us now go on our begging round.'

Shivaji then changed into the simple clothes of the mendicants, took a begging bag and water pot, and started following Ramadasa. Shouting 'Jaya Jaya Raghuvira Samartha', Ramadasa and his followers, including Shivaji, went around the village begging. Shivaji readily joined in all the chores of the ashrama, and after they had finished eating, Ramadas began a kirtana that lasted for two hours. When it was over, Ramadasa said, 'Well Shivaba, how do you feel now?' Shivaji replied, 'I am very happy, Guru Maharaj, in your service.' Then Ramadasa said: 'You are a Kshatriya prince. How can you go out begging alms with me? Was Arjuna allowed by Lord Krishna to become a sannyāsi and to beg for his food? Recollect this advice, take back this kingdom, put on this royal dress, and rule as a blessed deputy of God.' Shivaji did as his guru advised, and he and Ramadasa returned together to Satara."³⁹



The foundation of the Maratha Empire that Shivaji laid shook the Mughal Empire in the next few generations and much of India from Tamil Nadu to Attock (in Pakistan) was freed from Islamic rule by the Maratha rulers.

The Pride of Shivaji is crushed by Samartha Ramadasa:

"As Shivaji expanded his territory, he built forts in the mountains to keep watch on the surrounding areas. Once, Ramadasa was with him as the king was watching thousands of workers move up and down the mountain, at work on one of these forts. Ramadasa noticed that Shivaji had become very proud, thinking of his great achievements.

At this moment, Ramadas who sensed his thoughts came

³⁹ Parivrajika, pp. 195-196

over to the King and called his attention to a curious phenomenon. The saint picked up a rock from the basket of one of the workers and smashed it against a wall. To everyone's surprise it was found that the stone contained a live frog which leapt out of its erstwhile prison unharmed.

Taken aback by this wonderful sight, the King with the help of his sharp acumen was quick to grasp the meaning of the Guru's action: If God could provide a frog's wherewithal to live within a stone, who was he to think of himself as strong and powerful? Everything was indeed the Lord's play. God alone was the Doer and he, the King, was merely his servant and his instrument."⁴⁰

16.5 Hindu Kings of Indonesia



mūrti above.

About 85% of the population of Indonesia today is Muslim, and it has the largest number of Muslims of any country in the world. Only about 2% of Indonesians today are Hindus, and form a majority on the beautiful island of Bali. However, most people of the country follow Hindu culture. The national airline of Indonesia is called 'Garuda Air' after the mount of Bhagavān Vishnu. Most people have Sanskrit names (with a little modification). A very larger percentage of the words in their languages are derived from Sanskrit.

Many ancient Hindu scriptures like the Brihaspati Tattva and Ganapati Tattva were written in Indonesia many centuries ago. Indonesians believe that Hindu Dharma was brought to their country by none other than Rishi Agastya. There are many ancient Hindu temples in Indonesia, like the Shiva temple at Prambanan. In many major cities like Jakarta (the capital), one can see giant carvings from Hindu scriptures like Krishna teaching the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna. The Indonesian embassy in Washington DC (USA) has installed a beautiful 16 foot tall statue of Devi Sarasvati in a park. See the picture of this



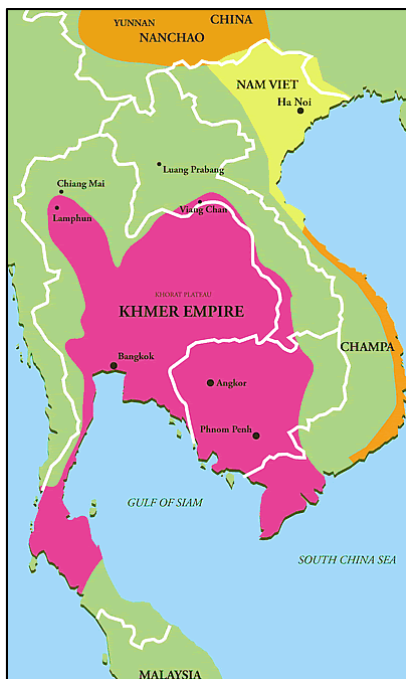
One of the reasons why Indonesians follow the Hindu culture is that for many centuries, their country was ruled by Hindu kings. The most famous Hindu dynasty of Indonesia was the Majapahit who ruled large parts of the

⁴⁰ Parivrajika, p. 202

country from their capital on the island of Java from 1293 to approximately 1500 CE. This dynasty was the first to unite the islands into one country that is today called Indonesia. After 1500 CE, the Majapahit dynasty became very weak and lost many battles to Muslim kingdoms on the western half of Java. Finally, the members of the royal family and many poets, scholars and other leaders of the empire fled to the island of Bali, which is still a Hindu island.



Even today, Muslim Indonesians show a great pride in the achievements of the Hindu Majapahit empire. Many Muslims and others have even converted to Hindu Dharma in recent years because they regard the Majapahit Empire as the golden period of the history of Indonesia. The flags of Indonesia and their navy are red and white in color because these two colors were found on the flag of the Majapahit kings. The national motto of Indonesia is also derived from a great poet who lived in the Majapahit empire. The currency bills of Indonesia show many pictures that are related to Hindu culture. Let us hope that one day, Hindu Dharma will once again become the major religion of Indonesia.



Did you know? The Bhagavad Gita has been translated several hundred times in over a hundred languages. But, the oldest translation available today is in Javanese, a language of Indonesia. This translation of over 80 verses of the Gita was completed around 1000 CE. Many other Hindu scriptures were translated into Indonesian languages, like the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Purāṇas.

16.6 Khmer Dynasty of Kampuchea (6th – 16th century CE):

The Khmer empire ruled in modern Kampuchea from the 6th-16th Century. They were successful because they dominated the sea trade between Asia and China, and could grow a lot of food because of their advanced methods of rice cultivation. At their capital, Khmer rulers built the largest and most famous Hindu Temple complexes called Angkor Wat in the 12th Century.

The temples are surrounded by a moat which is more than 3 miles in length! The temple has carvings showing scenes from Hindu scriptures like the Ramayana. The temples were started by King Suryavarman II in the 12th century CE. The kings after him constructed more temples.



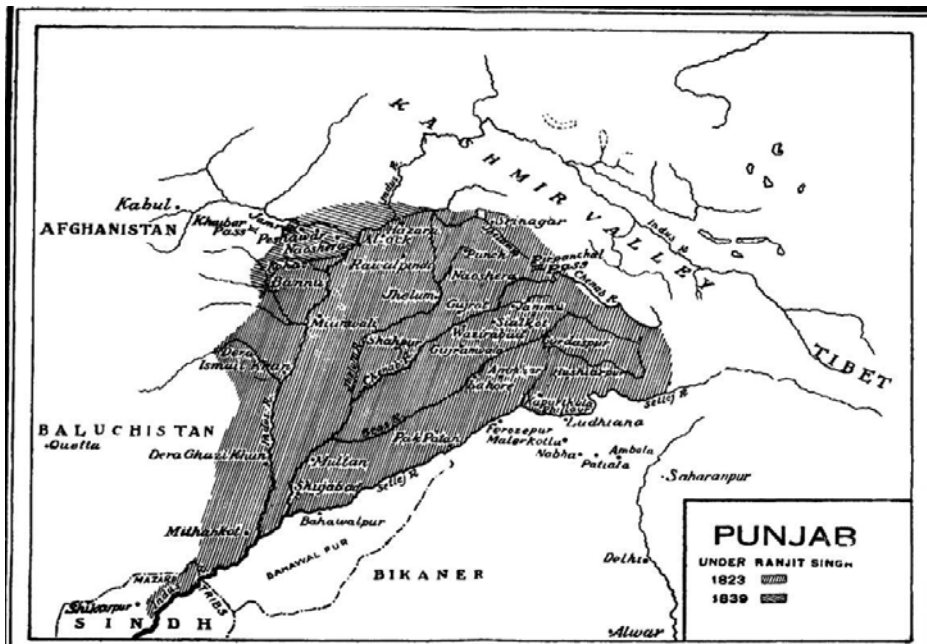
attention to this largest place of worship (a Hindu temple) in the world. Archaeologists are now working to restore these temples and many tourists from all over the world visit them every year.

16.7 Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh

Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh was the Sikh Emperor of Punjab from 1799 – 1839 CE. He was a noble king, very just and very generous towards the poor and the needy. He was born in the town of Gujrānwālā in northern Pakistan. In those times, the ordinary people of the Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir regions (which is today in India and Pakistan) were harassed a lot by their Afghan rulers. Some Sikh warriors took up arms and they created twelve tribes called the 'Misl's' which started overthrowing Muslim rule in that area. Unfortunately, many of these Misl's also indulged in looting and troubling the common people in many ways although they were not as oppressive as the Afghans.

Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh waged war against many of these Misl's and united them into a huge kingdom that eventually included most of the Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and even parts of the area that was inhabited by the Afghans. During his 40 yearlong rule, peace and prosperity reigned in the kingdom. Under the Afghan rule, Hindus and

Sikhs could not practice their religion freely, but now they could.



In his early childhood, Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh had lost one of his eyes due to small pox. The Emperor used to joke that Bhagavān gave him only one eye so that he could see people of all faiths with equal justice. And indeed, he was respectful towards Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. His foreign minister was a Muslim, and the Prime Minister was a Hindu. The Muslims were initially worried that Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh will favor Hindus and Sikhs and

will suppress them instead. But when the Emperor captured Lahore, a seat of Muslim power in the past, one of the first things he did was to enter the Bādshāhī Mosque (the largest mosque of the city) and offer prayers. He never ordered demolition of any mosque. Whenever his soldiers acquired a copy of the Koran (the Muslim holy book) from defeated enemies, Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh had the books handed over to Muslims in his kingdom with great respect.

The noble King banned the slaughter of cows in his kingdom because it is regarded as a sacred animal by the Hindus and Sikhs. He also asked the king of Afghanistan to stop killing of cows in his country. He threatened the Muslims rulers of Sindh in southern Pakistan that he will invade and occupy their country if they did not stop harassing the Hindus.

He spent considerable amount of money to renovate the Harmandir Sahib, the holiest temple of the Sikhs. He and his military generals constructed many other Mandirs and Gurudwaras (Sikh shrine) all over the kingdom. Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh also donated the entire amount of gold that covers the Vishvanāth Mandir in Varanasi, one of the holiest Hindu shrine, and to other Hindu Mandirs as well. In fact, his death wish was to donate the Kohinoor diamond (which was the largest diamond in the world at that time) to the Jagannāthā Mandir on eastern India. But his Hindu prime minister stopped the donation saying, "The diamond belongs to the state, and is not the personal property of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh." When he died of a stroke, he was cremated per Hindu ceremonies and a beautiful memorial was constructed over his ashes inside the fort of Lahore. Many of his Queens committed Sati.

Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh was illiterate, i.e., he could not read or write. But he was very intelligent and had a fantastic memory. It is said that he could remember the names of thousands of soldiers in his army. Numerous stories are narrated from his life illustrating the greatness of his character.

Story: Maharaja Ranjit Singh gives Charity to a Thief

One day, he was sitting under a tree in his garden. Suddenly, a stone came from the other side of the tree and hit him. His guards immediately ran to catch the culprit, who turned out to be a young lady. When she was asked as to why she had attacked the Maharaja with the stone, she started crying. She said, "Forgive me your majesty. I did not know that you or anyone else was sitting below this tree. I am a poor woman and have no money to buy food. So, I threw a stone at the tree, thinking that it will hit one of the mangoes and cause it to fall. I had hoped to eat that mango to fill my stomach."

The Maharaja ordered the guards to release the woman, and then said, "Give her some money so that she can buy food." The guards were surprised that the Maharaja gave money to the lady whose stone could have hurt him.

The king sensed their puzzled looks and said, "If her stone had hit the right spot on the tree, the tree would have given her food for her lunch. Now, am I not better than this tree? If the tree can give her a mango on being hit, I should surely give her something more. She was a poor woman and she threw a stone at the tree to fight her hunger."



Story: Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh works as Laborer:

The Emperor often disguised himself and took rounds in the city at night to check how his subjects were doing, and whether they were happy or not. Once, as he was walking on a street, he saw an old lady struggling to carry a bag of grains. Immediately, he rushed forward and helped her carry it to her home. The lady was very grateful and said, "I want to bless you with a long life. Tell me your name son." When Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh told her who he was, she started trembling with fear and asked for forgiveness, saying, "I am sorry your majesty. I did not know that you are our king. I would not have made you carry my load had I known that." The Emperor replied with great humility, "You have called me your son. It is my duty to help my mother. Please do not feel bad at all."

16.8 The Dogra Hindu rulers of Jammu and Kashmir: Mahārājā Pratāp Singh

Unfortunately, a few years after Mahārājā Raṇjīt Singh died, the British rulers invaded his empire and occupied it. They also took the Kohinoor diamond with them to England, where it is displayed even today to the visitors. They sold the regions of Jammu and Kashmir from his empire to a Hindu ruler of the Dogra dynasty. The Dogra rulers then invaded other areas and captured several parts of Tibet and the Muslim kingdoms to create a large kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir. In their kingdom, Hindus were once again able to practice our religion without any harassment. Below is a story from the life of a great Dogra ruler Mahārājā Pratāp Singh that teaches that no matter how rich and powerful we become, we must never lose our faith in Hindu Dharma.

Maharaja Pratāp Singh (1848-1925) of Jammu and Kashmir was a very religious Hindu King. Every day, he had Brahmanas perform various Pujas in his palace and gave charity to scholars. Some of his family members objected and said, “What is the use of wasting money on all these activities?” The Maharaja replied, “By the blessings of Bhagavān, I have a lot of wealth. There are many other people in this world who too have a lot of wealth, but most of them use it for wasteful purposes. At least, I am doing something good with my money.”

The Maharaja had utmost respect for the Brahmanas and cows. He got several temples constructed in his kingdom and banned the slaughter of cows. Once, he was walking on a street accompanied by many government officials. They saw a cow ahead, partially blocking the road. A courtier of the Maharaja promptly rushed forward and chased the animal away. The Maharaja was not pleased. He said, “I could have just walked around the cow. If Krishna could roam naked feet in forests to take care of his cows, why can’t I just walk around a cow that is resting peacefully on the street? Henceforth, do not trouble the cow for my sake.”



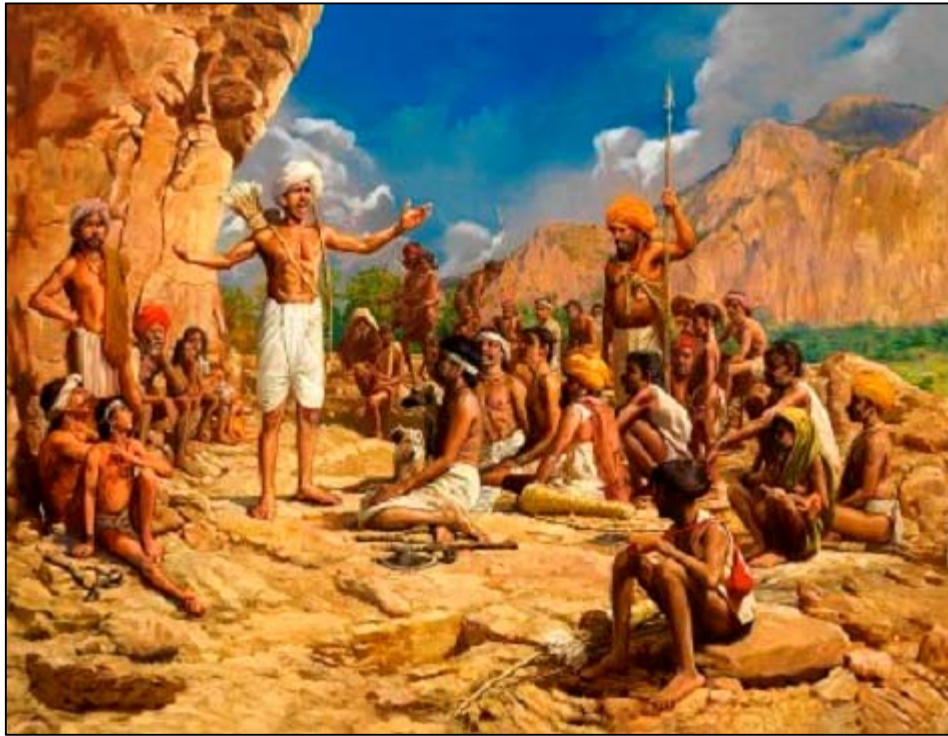
16.9 Birsā Mundā, the Ruler of Tribal Hindu hearts⁴¹

Birsā Mundā was born in a family of Mundā tribals in the Indian state of Jharkhand. In those days, the Christian missionaries from England and other European countries had swarmed the region and used various means to convert these poor and illiterate Hindu tribals to Christianity. Birsā was an intelligent boy and got admitted to a Christian school of his area. But, as a pre-condition to admission, he had to convert to Christianity, and change his name to Birsā David.

For some time, his education went well. But one day, he got infuriated with the abuses that a teacher at his German Mission school hurled at Mundā traditions. He realized that all European Christian missionaries were united in their contempt for Hindu tribal customs. He left the school in protest, and at the age of fifteen, went to study under a Hindu scholar Anand Pandey. Birsā became familiar with Hindu scriptures like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and adopted Hindu customs like vegetarianism and wearing the sacred thread. Armed with Hindu teachings, he went back to the Mundā tribals to preach Vaishnava Hindu values to them. He asked them to give up eating meat, witchcraft, polygamy and also taught the importance of worshipping Bhagavān regularly. To undermine the Christian Missionaries and oppose collection of taxes from the tribals by the Churches, he came upon a novel idea. He declared himself as the Prophet (in opposition to Jesus Christ) and asked his followers to stop paying taxes to the British masters.

The British government with the help of the Landlords, was gradually ousting the poor tribals from their traditional forest lands, in which they had lived for centuries. The situation looked very hopeless to the Mundā tribals.

⁴¹ <http://indiafacts.org/birsa-munda-first-tribal-martyr/>



His Guru Pandey too was a Hindu landlord, and advised Birsā to adopt peaceful ways of protesting. But, when peaceful protests did not work, Birsā parted ways with Pandey. He continued to teach Hindu values to the tribals and organized them to counter the Landlords as well as on the Christian missionaries – the two agents of the British rulers.

Birsā Munda and his armed followers were gearing to free their traditional forest land from the foreign government. Unfortunately, they proved no match for the might of the British Empire in India. Birsā was arrested in 1895

and jailed for two years. But soon after his release, he started organizing the tribals once again.

The Christian Missionaries of the region were very unhappy to see the growing popularity of Birsā Mundā because it was a big hurdle in their efforts to convert Hindu tribals to Christianity. He and Sali – a Mundā lady, began organizing an army of Mundā Hindu tribals to launch a final assault on some Christian missions of the area. Soon, a large number of these tribals were up in arms and they began to free their land from the British during 1899-1900. The British forces slaughtered with their guns hundreds of tribals who were armed with nothing more than bows and arrows.

The British and the Christian Missionaries were terrified of Birsā Mundā's influence on the rebellious tribals and their rising power. One night, in March 1900, as he was asleep, the British captured him and jailed him. But, they were scared to execute him, for the fear of inciting a great tribal rebellion in the area. Unfortunately, Birsā Mundā died mysteriously in the prison in June that year. Some say that he was poisoned.

Although Birsā Mundā lived a short life of 25 years, his legacy is celebrated by Hindu tribals even today not only in his native state of Jharkhand, but also in many other parts of India. In fact, the Bihar Military Regiment of the Indian Army still uses the words 'Birsā Munda ki Jai' as its war cry.

Birsā Mundā's life is very inspirational for many reasons. He was a poor tribal from a very ordinary family. His people, the Mundās, were living a life without any hope, and felt helpless before the might of the British Empire, the Landlords and the Missionaries. Birsā Mundā inspired the tribals to practice Hindu ideals and unite against the might of their exploiters. He inspired them to be proud of their heritage, and reject the negative views that the missionaries had for their traditions. Even though his people were armed with nothing more than bows and arrows, their rebellion made it clear to the British Rulers of India that the tribals were not weak, that they were willing to fight for their rights, and were proud of their Hindu Mundā heritage.

17. Brave & Dhārmic Hindu Women

16.1 Dhārmic Queens of South East Asia:

When Hindu dynasties ruled South East Asia, many noble queens spent a lot of their wealth to benefit Hindu Dharma. Queen Kulaprabhāvatī of the Hindu Khmer Kingdom (in Kampuchea) was a pious queen who in the fifth century (c.475) made many donations to a Vaishnava ashram in which Sadhus who worshipped Bhagavān Vishnu lived. Several other Hindu queens like Kambujarājālakshmi, Jayadevī in that dynasty also gave lots of charity for social welfare works (i.e. for things that benefited the society at large).

In Indonesia, Gunapriya Dharmapatri (late 10th century CE), the great-granddaughter of the Hindu King of eastern Java, married the Balinese Hindu prince Udayana. She introduced Javanese Hindu traditions into Bali. She was so influential that her name appears before that of Udayana in Balinese inscriptions. Goa Gajah, the Elephant Cave, near Bedulu, not far from Ubud, was built around this time, as a rock hermitage for Shaivite priests due to her help.

17.2 Rani Rudrāmbā Devī

She was the only child of the 6th King of the Kākatīya Dynasty of Telangana (13th century CE) and succeeded her father to his throne. Her father got her educated fully in the affairs of the state craft. She made a mark of bravery while accompanying her father in his victory tours.

Thinking her to be a weak woman, the local chiefs and the area commanders revolted and neighboring rulers also found an occasion to grab her territory. But, Rudrāmbā defeated them all. She married the Chalukya king Virabhadra and they jointly ruled over the Kakatiya kingdom very effectively for many decades.



17.3 The Dancer of Srirangam Mandir



Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi, deputed his eldest son Ulugh Khan to invade the Hindu kingdoms of South India in 1321 C.E. When the Muslim army of Ulugh Khan was close to the Srirangam temple, a festival was being conducted. When the invaders reached a place called Samayapuram, a senior official of the temple, decided that no time was to be lost. He requested the 12000 ascetics who had gathered there not to disperse and instead form a human wall to stop the army. Then, he locked the doors of the main worship chamber, barred the doorways of the shrines of both Vishnu and Lakshmi, and placed fake images outside. The invading army desecrated the shrine, killed all the 12000 unarmed ascetics. In the meantime, some temple officials gained enough time to take important articles from the temple to safe places.

The Muslim army occupied the temple and put an end to Hindu worship. A temple dancer, who fascinated the invading general, persuaded him not to destroy the temple altogether, and restrict his vandalism to the destruction of a few minor parts of the temple.

The Brahmins in the surrounding areas tried to perform the sacred rituals whenever they could, but were harassed by the occupying Muslim forces constantly. Unable to bear the harassment of the devotees by the Muslims, she enticed the Muslim chief, took him up a temple tower in the east, and in the pretext of showing him a famous

Mūrti from there, she pushed him down and killed him.

Scared that she will be tortured by the Muslims as a result of her deed, she threw herself also down and committed suicide. According to tradition, to honor her memory, the funeral pyres of temple dancers were henceforth lit by fire brought from the temple kitchen. In 1371 C.E., the newly founded Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar wrested back Srirangam from Muslim control, but it was the bravery of the courtesan and the 12,000 defenseless ascetics that had saved the Mandir from total destruction.

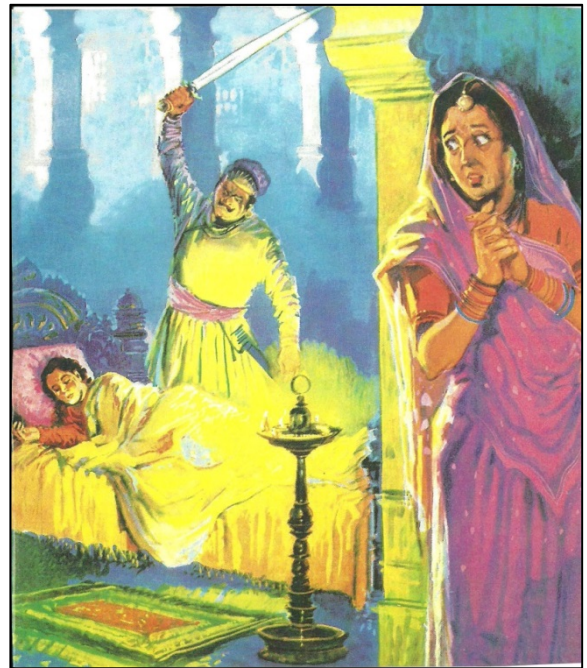
17.4 Patriotism of Pannā Dhāī

After the death of the Mahārāṇā Ratan Singh II of Mewār in 1527 CE, he was succeeded on the throne by the crown prince Vikramāditya. But he proved incompetent for kingship as he was very hot tempered. Therefore, the Rajput chiefs appointed the younger Prince Udaysingh as the ruler. However, as Udaysingh was a minor, a chief named Banveer was appointed as the regent. Banveer soon became ambitious and started dreaming of becoming the King of Mewār himself. One night, he entered the room of Prince Vikramāditya while he was sleeping and beheaded him.

The word soon reached Panna Dai, who was the nursemaid of Udaysingh. Her own son Chandan, was also a minor and of the same age as Udaysingh. She promptly put Prince Udaysingh's clothes on her own son, and asked for Udaysingh to be hidden in a basket. Then, she placed her own son wearing Udaysingh's cloths on the Prince's bed. She asked a loyal royal servant to take the basket to the banks of a river close by and wait for her.

When Banveer entered Prince Udaysingh's room, he mistook Chandan for the prince and beheaded him. Panna Dai sobbed silently as she saw her son killed. She lifted his beheaded body and placed it in another basket. At the river, she immersed her dead son's body and ran away with Prince Udaysingh.

By sacrificing her own son, she saved the life of the future ruler Udaysingh. She carried the Prince from town to town till they were provided refuge by a rich merchant. After several years, when the Prince grew secretly to be a strong teenager, the Rajput chiefs discovered him. There was a battle in which the population of Mewār supported Prince Udaysingh. Banveer was defeated and was never heard of again. Prince Udaysingh became the next Mahārāṇā of Mewār in 1540 CE and also founded the city of Udaipur, famous for its palaces in India today.



17.5 Rani Durgāvatī (1524 – 1564 CE)

Rani Durgāvatī was born in a Rajput Hindu family associated with the ancient Chandella dynasty. At the age of 18, she married a Gond Tribal Hindu prince of Gondwana, a region in central India. Soon thereafter, she had a son but unfortunately her husband died. As her baby boy was very young, she ruled the kingdom with the help of some ministers. She promoted Hindu sculpture, and people in her kingdom were happy. But meanwhile, Akbar became the 3rd Mughal Emperor of India in 1556 CE. Although a teenager, with the help of his guardian Bairam Khan and other military advisors, he launched a conquest of north India. Numerous wars were fought, several hundred soldiers died and many kingdoms were conquered by the Mughal Empire.

Attracted by the prosperity of her kingdom, the Muslim ruler of Malwa attacked Gondwana in 1556, but she defeated his army. Soon, the Moghul Empire itself defeated Malwa, and now their army got ready to invade Gondwana. The first battle was fought in 1564. Rani Durgāvati's prime minister advised her to accept defeat because the Moghul army was vast and very well armed in comparison to Gondwana. But the Rani refused and said that it is



better to die defending her country than accept defeat and live a life of disgrace. In the battle, one of main military commanders was killed and therefore, she decided to lead the army herself.

Initially, Rani Durgāvati was able to push back the Moghul army from the area. Then, she consulted her army officers about the next plan of action. Unfortunately, they did not agree to her proposal that the soldiers of Gondwana should attack at night. By the next morning, the Moghul army received some large cannons from Delhi and launched an attack. Rani Durgāvati's twenty year old son too joined the battle. However, he got injured and had to be removed from the battlefield. She too was soon hit by an arrow close to her ear and another in her neck. Rani Durgāvati fainted and her elephant driver took her away to safety.

When she regained consciousness, she realized that her army was facing a defeat. But instead of running away, she took out her dagger and stabbed herself to death. Akbar praised her bravery. People of Gondwana rose in revolt. It is said that throughout the long reign of Akbar, her people continuously revolted and Akbar was not therefore able to conquer her kingdom completely even though she was no more.

In her honor, India has named a train and a university after her and has released a postage stamp with her picture. Rani Durgāvati's life shows that many brave soldiers prefer death over surrendering to their enemy.

17.6 Hādī Rani: Duty before One's Life

In the year 1660, the Mahārāṇā of Mewār was proceeding to marry the Princess Prabhāvatī of Roopnagar. He heard that the powerful and fanatical Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb was also coming to Roopnagar to forcibly marry the Princess, convert her to Islam and add her to his harem. The Princess appealed to the Mahārāṇā to hurry, and the Mahārāṇā sought the help of one of his chiefs Rao Ratan Singh of Salumber to stop the Emperor's forces.

Ratan Singh was in a fix. He had just reached his home with his newly wed bride, Princess Hadi of Bundi. When Hadi Rani heard of the situation, she urged her husband to give up all hesitation and rush to the battlefield to intercept the Moghul forces. Ratan Singh did not want to leave yet, as he had just married and wanted to spend some time with his bride. But Hadi Rani said, "We are Rājput, and for us, nothing is more important than our honor. Tomorrow might be too late. We cannot see a Rajput princess being dishonored. We Rājput are known for our chivalry and do not worry about losing our lives to protect the honor of a helpless Rajput Princess. If you delay and the Moghul seizes Prabhāvatī, the people of our area will never forgive you."



Inspired by his bride, Ratan Singh set out for battle. But hardly had he gone outside his fort that he began to long for his bride and hesitated to proceed further. He sent her a message asking for a memento that he could see if he missed her. When Hadi Rani got a message, she asked for a giant metal plate and a sword. She asked them to take the plate with the memento that she was going to hand over to them soon. And before her attendants could realize what was happening, she beheaded herself!

The maids then placed her head on the plate and covered it with a piece of cloth to be sent to Ratan Singh. When the Rajput chief saw the cut head of his beloved wife, he was filled with grief, and also with admiration for her Rajput chivalry. He resolved that he will not let his bride's sacrifice go in vain.

He charged towards the battlefield and intercepted the Moghul forces in the valley of Gogunde, defeating them soundly. And then, the victorious Rajput chief beheaded himself to unite with his brave bride in death!

Their sacrifice did not go in vain. The Mahārāṇā of Mewār rescued Princess Prabhāvatī and married her, as she had wanted.

17.6 Ahalyabai Holkar: The Queen of Dharma

The Poor Girl becomes a Queen: Ahalyabai was born to a poor farmer close to the city of Pune in western India. One day, King Malharrao Holkar of Indore was passing through the region when he noticed Ahalyabai praying at a Shiva Mandir. He was very impressed by her good manners and devotion to Bhagavān Shiva and decided to marry her to his son, Prince Khanderao Holkar of Indore.

Khanderao and Ahalyabai together had a son named Malerao. Unfortunately, in a battle in the year 1754, her husband Khanderao died. King Malhaarao was shattered, and was sorry to see his daughter in law widowed. But soon, he recovered from his sorrow, and announced, "Ahalyabai, now you are my son. I want that after my death, you rule the kingdom till Malerao becomes an adult." He decided to train her in the art of administration, and also took her whenever he fought battles. And so, in 1766, when Malharrao passed away, Ahalyabai Holkar became the Queen of Indore.

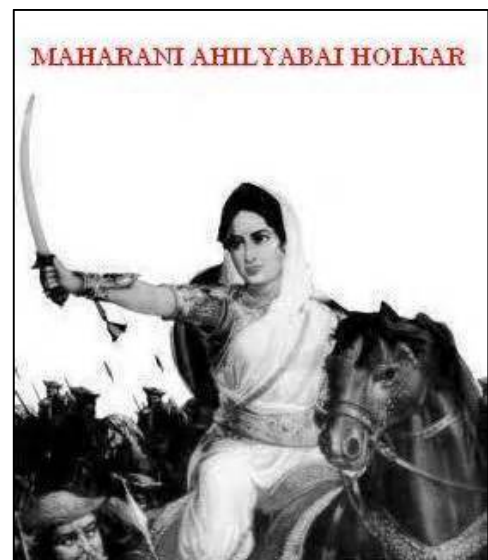


And yet, another tragedy stuck Ahalyabai Holkar soon. Her son died too, and now she was left alone.

The Bravery of the young Queen: Thinking that she was a weak woman, the King of Pune Peshwā Raghobā started harassing her. He demanded that the Queen give the wealth from her kingdom's treasure to his kingdom. But Ahalyabai firmly refused and replied, "The wealth of my kingdom belongs to Bhagavān Shiva. Raghobā, you are a Brahmana. Therefore, if you come and beg for money from me, I can give it to you in charity because our Dharma asks us to do charity to Brahmanas."

Raghobā was very annoyed and he landed at Indore with his army to defeat her in a battle. Queen Ahalyabai sent him a message, "If you win the war against me, how does it matter? After all, you will have defeated a woman. But if I defeat you, the whole of India will make fun of you and say that you lost to a woman."

Peshwā Raghobā felt very ashamed, and instead asked that he stay as a guest in her palace for a month. During his stay, Peshwā Raghobā saw that the Queen was truly a very Dharmic lady, an



intelligent ruler, and a very just administrator. Finally, he left her kingdom, full of admiration for her.

Ahilyābāi Holkar as a Great Queen: Ahalyabai Holkar, the Pious and Humble Queen of Indore in central India, ruled the kingdom for almost 30 years (1767 – 1795) with great skill and justice. She invited rich merchants from all over India to settle in her kingdom so that it became very prosperous. She also appointed poor Hindu Bhil tribals to guard the highways so that traders and travelers do not get robbed. Peace prevailed during her benign rule. Trade flourished and merchants and farmer in her kingdom became very rich.

During 500 years of Islamic rules, many Hindu temples had been damaged or destroyed. The queen repaired numerous old and crumbling temples not only in her own kingdom but in many other kingdoms. An important temple that she got reconstructed was the Vishwanath Temple in the holy city of Varanasi. The gold to cover its dome was donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. This is one of holiest temples of Hindus. She also repaired the Ghats on the river Ganga, got the frescos at the Ellora temple re-painted, and gave donations to several other temples all over India.

Protector of the Weak: A widow herself, she opened a department in her government to ensure that widows in



her kingdom were not deprived of their inheritance, and that they were able to take care of their own children. She spent the money from her treasury for opening schools for the poor, for constructing roads and for establishing rest-houses for travelers on the highways. Every day, she distributed clothes and food to the poor and to Hindu Sadhus. She also got constructed mosques for her Muslim subjects. Due to her charitable activities, people regarded her as a saint in her own lifetime.

Her Simplicity and Humility: And yet, Ahalyabai lived a very simple and humble life as long as she lived. She did not live in her palace in the city of Indore. Instead, she moved to a location on Maheshwar, a pilgrimage center on the Narmada river, and carried out her administration from there. Once, two poor widows offered to give their entire wealth to her, saying that they had no use for it. But Ahalyabai declined to take it and asked them to use it for philanthropic activities instead. One day, a poet presented her with a book that had several poems in her praise. She just threw the book into the Narmada river. On another occasion, a famous painter approached her with a request to paint her picture. But she declined, saying that she would prefer that he made paintings depicting the Hindu Deities.

Although she was the queen, she never wore any jewels or colorful expensive clothing. Instead, she always attired herself in the simple white clothes of a Hindu widow, and was frequently seen carrying a small Shivalinga, to which she offered worship with a lot of Bhakti. Ahalyabai did not differentiate between the rich and the poor when they brought their complaints to her. She met even the poorest of the farmers personally and patiently listened to them.

Queen Ahalyabai Holkar always ate her meals with her attendants in the kitchen itself. She was a vegetarian throughout her life, and spent time every day reading Hindu scriptures. During the thirty years that she ruled, every other kingdom in India was wrecked by wars. It is only her kingdom that remained free of violence, and peace reigned supreme.



The Honesty of

Ahilyābāi Holkar: Once, King Mahadji Scindia, the ruler of the neighboring kingdom of Gwalior, proposed an unethical deal to her. The deal would have benefited her kingdom, but she refused to accept his proposal because it was against the teachings of Hindu Dharma. King Scindia got very angry and threatened her, “Remember Ahalyabai, we are men and you are just a woman. How dare you refused my proposal?”

Ahalyabai sent the reply back, “So what if you are a man. I am not weak. I am the daughter in law of King Malharrao. If you have guts, come and invade my kingdom with your army and I will prove who is weaker – you or I. I will see to it that you get tied to elephant chains and dragged on the streets.” King Scindia got scared at the brave response of Queen Ahalyabai Holkar and promptly withdrew his steps.

The Queen and her Dishonest Official: The noble queen Ahilyabai Holkar, a widow herself, opened a department in her government to ensure that the property and other rights of widows are protected. She also spent a lot of her kingdom’s money to provide for poor and destitute widows. One day, she learned that the official who was in charge of taking care of the funds of that department was stealing money that was meant for the widows.

She summoned the official and took him on a boat ride to the middle of the Narmada river. Then, showing him the account books, she said to him, “Look, I know that you have manipulated the accounts so that no one catches you for stealing money meant for the poor widows. I want you to throw these account books into the river with your own hands. Then no one will have any proof that you are a thief because there will be no accounts to cross-check against the stolen money.”

The official broke down and asked her, “Your majesty, I confess that I have stolen money. Then why do you want to destroy the proof that you can use to prosecute me?” The Queen replied, “I do not want the poor widows to find it out, because if they do, then they will lose all faith in me. They will lose hope that the government is sincerely trying to do good to them. This department of my government is the only source of their livelihood. And if they discover that even that is not reliable, they will not have reason to live.”

These words of the noble Queen really pierced the heart of the official and he turned over a new leaf. He decided that henceforth, he will be completely honest and will not steal any more money that was meant to provide for the poor widows.

The Legacy of Ahilyābāi Holkar: In her own lifetime, all the big rulers of India became her admirers, including Nizam, the Muslim ruler of Hyderabad. The fame of this humble and pious ruler of the kingdom of Indore lasts even today. To perpetuate her memory, the citizens of the city of Indore instituted an award in her name. Her descendants have started a trust to perpetuate her philanthropic works up to this day.

The government of India has also released a postal stamp in her honor. And when Hindus undertake pilgrimages to the sacred towns of Varanasi, Rameshvaram, Gaya, Dwaraka, Ayodhya, Kanchi etc., they are reminded of the charities of the noble Queen due to which the temples at these got constructed or repaired. In fact, whenever a Ghat on a river, or a temple in a holy town is found to be unregistered, people name it after Ahalyabai Holkar even today.

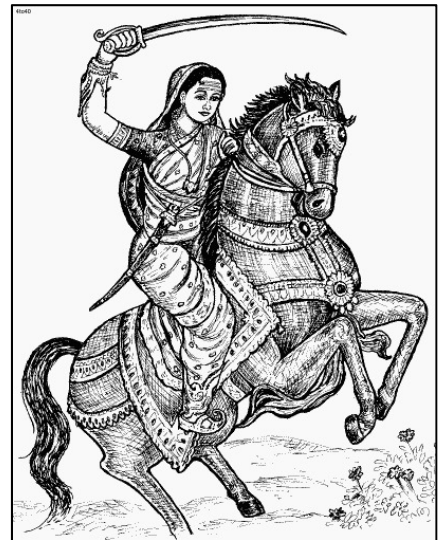


Truly, Queen Ahilyābāi Holkar was one of the most illustrious rulers that Hindus have had, and an unparalleled champion of our Dharma and traditions in recent times.

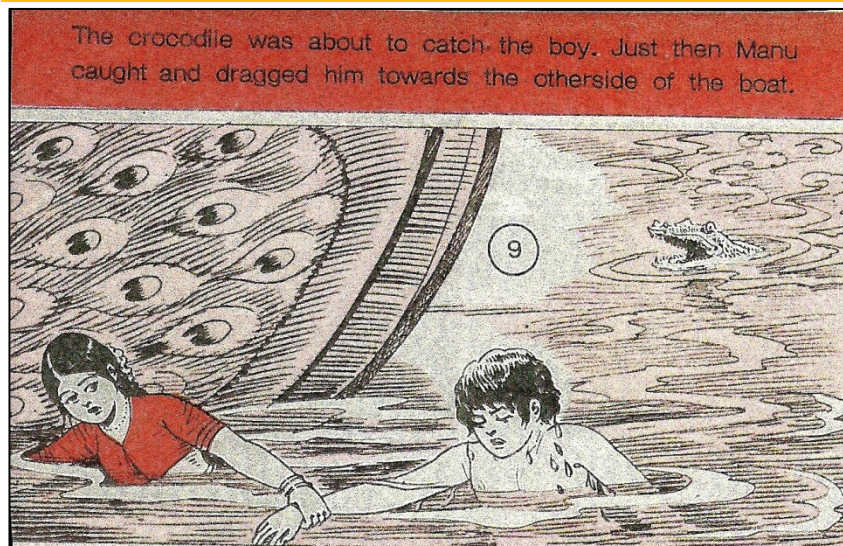
17.7 Rani Chennamma of Kittur (1778-1829)

She received training in horse riding, sword fighting and archery in her young age. She was married to Raja Mulasarja of Kittur, a princely state in Belgaum in Karnataka. Her husband died in 1816. Her only son died in 1824.

Chennamma adopted Shivalingappa as her son and made him heir to the throne. The British did not accept this and ordered the expulsion of Shivalingappa. The Rani defied the order. A great battle ensued. The Rani fought the British with great courage and skill. She could not, however, hold out for long. She was taken captive and lodged in Bailhongal Fort where she died in early 1829.



17.5 Rani Lakshmibai



Rani Lakshmibai was born in Varanasi in the year 1835. Even as a little girl, she showed great valor. One day, she was in Varanasi on a boat floating on River Ganga, watching the festival of Dussehra. Suddenly, there was a cry. A crocodile was rushing toward a group of little boys who were swimming in the river. All the boys swam to the shore safely but one of the them struggled hard. Suddenly, a girl jumped from a boat, swam to the boy, pulled him away from the approaching crocodile and

got him close to a boat where the boatmen rescued the two kids. The girl's name was Manu, and she grew up to be the famous brave Queen Rani Lakshmibai.

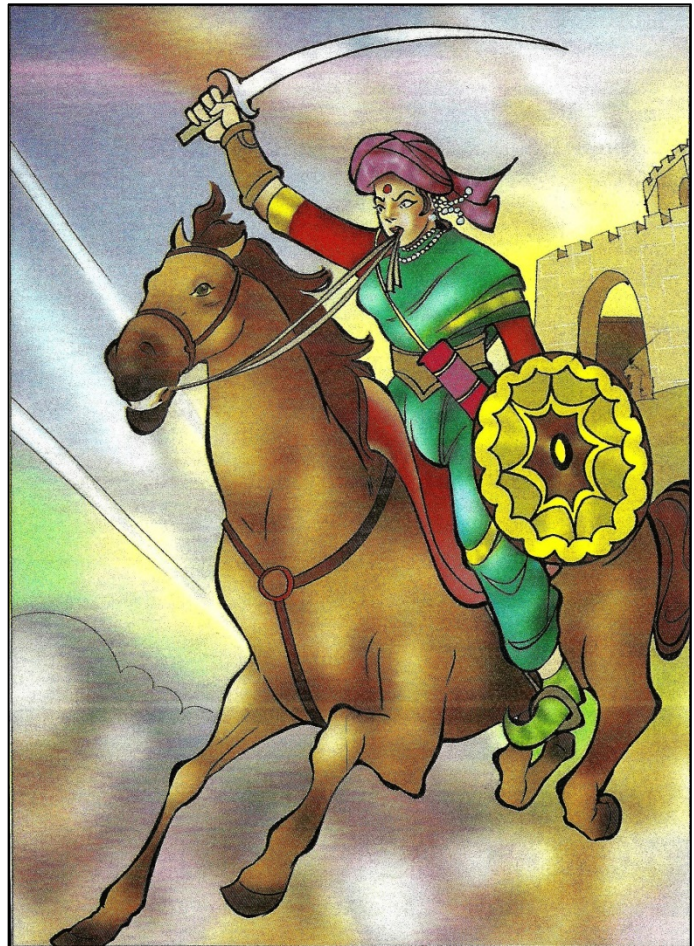
The girl's bravery was witnessed by the Maratha Emperor Bajirao II. After a few years, Lakshmibai herself married King Gangadhar Rao of a small kingdom Jhansi in Central India. As the couple did not have their own child, they adopted one. Unfortunately, the King died soon thereafter, leaving Lakshmibai a widow.

In those days, the British, who ruled much of India, used to occupy Indian kingdoms giving minor excuses. The British announced their decision to become rulers of Jhansi too, giving the reason that King Gangadhar Rao had not left any son of his own to succeed him, and they do not accept the adopted son as his successor. They told Rani Lakshmibai that she could continue to live in the fort with a monthly salary of Rupees 5000, but that she will no longer be the ruler of the kingdom. The Rani was very annoyed at their decision and waited for an opportunity to fight their injustice.

In 1857, large sections of Indian soldiers serving the British rulers rebelled. They started killing their British officers and occupied one city after another. Rani Lakshmibai took advantage of this opportunity and declared that she was now the true ruler of Jhansi and will not accept the rule of British over her.

Led by Sir Hugh Rose, the British army attacked her fort. But the brave Rani tied her son to her back, and with a sword in her hand, charged through the British soldiers and escaped to another place called Kālpi. The British army now attacked Kālpi too and the Rani lost, but she fled fighting and hid in the jungles with Tantia Tope, another leader of the rebel soldiers. Together, they gathered more soldiers and invaded the kingdom of Gwalior, which was loyal to the British.

The British were stunned to see that Rani Lakshmibai and Tantia Tope had captured the fort of Gwalior and caused its ruler, who was loyal to them, to flee his own fort. They invaded Gwalior with a huge army and with advanced cannons and guns. The smaller and poorly equipped army of the rebels was no match for them. Jalkārī Bāī, another brave woman who looked a lot like Rani Lakshmibai offered to fool the British by pretending to be the Rani. Jalkārī Bāī rode out of the fort on a horse, and the British soldiers charged at her while the Rani escaped. However, the British soon realized their mistake and were able to surround the Rani on her horseback.



The valiant queen fought several male soldiers single handedly but eventually she was outnumbered and killed. Her bravery was praised by several British officers, and the Indian poetess Subhadrā Kumarī Chauhān later wrote a beautiful poem in her praise to inspire other Indian freedom fighters. Because of her bravery her love of freedom, Rani Lakshmibai is often said to be India's 'Joan of Arc.'

Class Exercise: Find out more about Joan of Arc and what she is famous for.

17.9 The Bravery of Unniyarchā

In the early 17th cent. CE., there lived a fencing and martial arts master named Aromal Chekavar. He trained his sister Unniyarcha also in sword-fighting. Unfortunately, she got married to a coward named Kunnhiraman.

One day, Unniyarcha expressed a wish to offer worship at a nearby Mandir of Bhagavān Ayappa. But her mother in law refused permission saying, “The path to the Mandir is dangerous. Often, members of the Chonaka tribe attack pilgrims and carry away their women as prisoners.”

But Unniyarcha would not be daunted. With a sword in her hand, she proceeded to the Mandir, taking her husband. On the way, the Chonaka tribesmen attacked the group, but Unniyarcha unsheathed her sword and valiantly killed her attackers. When the Chonaka chief heard about his men being killed by a woman, he too rushed to fight her. But, he soon realized that it was none other than the sister of his own martial arts Guru Aromal.

He appealed to Unniyarcha to sheath her sword and pardon him. But Unniyarcha was in no mood to forgive him till he gave a promise that henceforth, no member of his tribe would attack pilgrim women on their way to the Mandir. Because of Unniyarcha’s bravery, many women were saved from kidnapping in the years that followed, and a ballad was written in Malayalam language in her honor. In modern times, even a movie has been made to depict the life of this brave heroine and plays are enacted to depict her bravery and fearlessness.



18. Clever, Witty and Humorous Hindus

18.1 Birbal: The Witty, Wise and Brave Minister of Emperor Akbar

Emperor Akbar ruled India from 1556 – 1605 CE. Compared to many other Muslim rulers, he was not as harsh towards the Hindus. He also employed many Hindus in positions of importance in his government. One of these was Birbal, who was born in a Brahmana family of Uttar Pradesh. He was a favorite of Akbar, who even had a house for Birbal built close to his own palace. Birbal died in a military campaign in North Western Frontier Province (Pakistan) around 1598 CE. Emperor Akbar was so grieved that he did not eat for two days. It is said that Birbal was not just brave and learned, but also very clever and witty. He is said to have entertained the emperor with his wittiness. Many stories are told of Birbal getting the better of Akbar or his other courtiers.

These stories teach us valuable lessons of everyday life. The lives of Birbal and others in this chapter show that we should not be just learned and intelligent. We should also be fun loving and clever in the ways of the world. We should use our wisdom and cleverness for supporting Dharma, and also for making others laugh become cheerful.

Story: Who pulled the King's Beard?

One day, King Akbar asked a strange question to everyone in his palace. He said, "Someone pulled my beard today morning. What punishment should I give to him?"



Everyone was shocked when they heard that their Emperor had been attacked. One person said, "He should be killed because he tried to hurt you, our King."

The second person said, "He should be sent to jail for attacking our King." The third person said, "He should be beaten up."

Akbar then asked Birbal, "What do you think? What should be his punishment?"

Birbal smiled and said, "King, I think that you should give candy to the person who pulled your beard."

Everyone was surprised at Birbal's reply. They asked him, "How can we give candy to the evil man who pulled our King's beard?"

Birbal said, "There is only one person who can dare to pull the King's beard. And that person is none other than the King's grandson. Children do these pranks with their elders because they are very sweet and naughty. Therefore, we must not get angry with them."

Akbar laughed and said, "You are correct Birbal. It was indeed my grandson Khurram who had pulled my beard. You are really a very wise man!"

Story: The Straw in the Thief's Beard

One day, a man came crying to the court of Emperor Akbar. He said, "Your Majesty! I had a gold necklace in my home. But someone stole it last night."

The Emperor asked, "Are you suspicious of anyone who might have stolen it? Who all do you think actually knew that you had the gold necklace?"

The man replied, "I do not have any idea who could have stolen my necklace. But, I live in a building that has many apartments. Some of my neighbors had seen me wearing that necklace on Diwali."

Now, the Emperor became very confused. He could not think of any idea for catching the thief. He called Birbal for help. Birbal said to the Emperor, "I want every man in that building to be arrested and brought to the court. They will be kept in the prison for two weeks. They will not be allowed to shave. Then, they will be brought to the court with beards on their faces."

Emperor Akbar ordered the arrest of all the 25 men who lived in that building, exactly as Birbal had asked for. After two weeks, when the men were brought to the court, they all had beards and moustaches.

The Akbar asked, "So Birbal, have you found out who stole the necklace from among these men?" Birbal replied, "Of course your majesty. The thief has a straw stuck to his beard!"

All the men with the beards looked at each other. But the person who had committed the theft really thought that there was a straw stuck to his beard. Therefore, he started scratching his beard to take off the straw.

When Birbal saw that man touching his beard, he immediately ordered guards to arrest him. Later, the man confessed that he had stolen the necklace, and told the guards where he had hidden it. Akbar was very impressed seeing Birbal's wisdom. He asked, "Birbal, how did you manage to put a straw on the thief's beard?"

Birbal replied, "I never really put any straw in the thief's beard. But when he heard me, he felt guilty and started touching his beard. By doing this, he revealed to everyone that he was the thief."



Who is the Greatest Emperor?



One evening, King Akbar invited all his friends and Birbal to a dinner. The King boasted, "I think I am the greatest King in the world. There is no King who is greater than I am. In fact, I am even greater than God."

Then, the King asked his friends, "Tell me, do you think that I am correct? Am I not greater than God?"

Akbar's friends got scared. They did not want to make Akbar angry by saying that God is the greatest of all. So they just kept quiet.

But Birbal got up and said, "Yes your Highness, you are greater than God."

King Akbar said to Birbal, "I am really happy to hear that from you. You never speak a lie. Are you

sure that I am greater even than God?"

Birbal replied, "Of course, your Highness! If someone annoys you, you can banish them from your kingdom. But God cannot banish anyone from His kingdom. This means that you are greater than God because you can do something that He cannot do!"

When Akbar heard this, he felt ashamed. He now understood that Bhagavān was the emperor of the whole universe. Therefore, he cannot throw anyone out from his kingdom. Wherever that person goes, he will still be inside Bhagavān's kingdom.

Bhagavān Loves us like His own Children

One day, Birbal told the story of Gajendra and Vishnu to King Akbar. The King liked the story but he did not like the fact that Bhagavān Vishnu came Himself to protect the elephant from the jaws of the crocodile.

He asked Birbal, "Why did Bhagavān Vishnu have to come himself to protect Gajendra? He is the master of the Universe. He should have asked a servant to protect the elephant instead of coming Himself."

Birbal replied, "Bhagavān comes to this earth as Krishna, Rama and in many other ways to protect us. He wants to do it Himself, because he loves us a lot."

Akbar said, "I do not agree to what you say. I think that Bhagavān Vishnu should have sent a servant instead of taking the trouble himself."

Birbal decided to use a trick to make King Akbar understand his answer. He asked a servant to make a wax statue of the Prince. A few days later, Birbal and Akbar went for a walk to a pond. The Prince and the servant also played around that same pond every day.

Suddenly, the servant came rushing to King Akbar and Birbal. He shouted, 'King, the Prince fell into the water. He is drowning.'



As soon as King Akbar heard it, he rushed to pond to save the Prince. But when he dragged out the Prince from the water, he discovered that it was only a wax statue. Birbal looked at the King and asked, "Why did you jump into the water? You could have asked me, or one of your servants?"

King Akbar replied, "I thought it was my own son who fell into the water. I love my son a lot. Therefore, I wanted to save him myself. How can I wait for someone else to protect my own son?"

Birbal smiled and said, "Now you know why Bhagavān Vishnu comes Himself to save his Bhaktas. He considers us as His own children. Therefore, he does not want any servants to protect us. It is because of His love that he takes these different forms to save us, just as he saved Gajendra from the crocodile."

Emperor Akbar now understood why we Hindus believe that Bhagavān comes Himself in different forms to protect humans.

Story: Say it Nicely

One day, an astrologer came to Birbal to seek his advice. He had gone to the home of a rich man to read the lines on his palm and predict his future. The astrologer examined the palm and said, "You will see all your relatives die in front of your own eyes."

The rich man became so angry with the astrologer, that he had him beaten up and had him thrown out of his home. The astrologer then came to Birbal to understand why he was beaten up for speaking the truth.

Birbal said to him, "No one wants to see his loved ones die in front of him. That was obviously a wrong thing to say, even though it was the truth. Why don't you go

back to him after a few months, and give the following prediction to him, "You will really live long and will be the longest lived person in your social circles."

The astrologer did as he was told, and was surprised that the rich man was now very pleased with him and even rewarded him with a few gold coins.

The astrologer understood the advice of Birbal. He had said the same thing to the rich man both the times, but the second time on, he had said it more gently and in a more acceptable manner.

This story shows that while we must speak the truth, we should have the necessary wisdom to say it correctly and in a way that does not make anyone angry or sad.



18.2 Tenāli Raman

Tenāli Raman was a very wise man who worked in the court of the great Hindu Emperor Krishna Deva Raya in the early 16th century. Many interesting stories are told of him and we give two of them below.

Story: The Brightest Home on Diwali

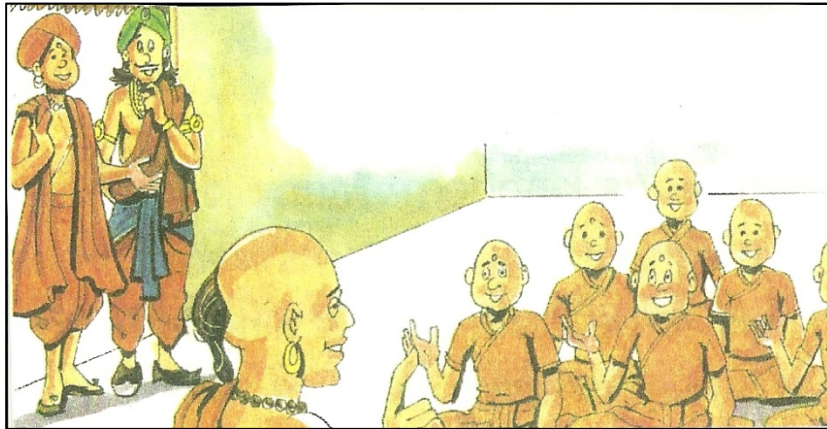
On the Diwali night, we light lamps in our home to welcome Devi Lakshmi. All homes are cleaned to look very bright and beautiful.

One year, King Krishna Deva Raya announced a competition for Diwali. He said that he will award a bag full of gold coins to the person whose home is the brightest of all on the night of Diwali. Everyone in his city started buying thousands of lamps. They all wanted their home to be the brightest, so that they could win the prize.

On the Diwali night, the King and Tenali Raman went around their capital to find out the brightest home. They were pleased to see how hard everyone had worked to light up their homes. People had placed thousands of lamps everywhere to make their homes bright. They made different designs with the lamps which made them look even more beautiful.

One of the homes had ten thousand lamps. Its owner had also decorated it with flowers kept between the lamps. King Krishna Deva Raya was very happy to see this home. He said to Tenali Raman, "I think that this home should get the prize for winning the contest. Look, how bright it is! And he has used many colorful flowers around the lamps too!"

But Tenali replied, "Not so soon, dear King! I will take you to a home which is even more brightly lit. Please follow me." The King walked behind Tenali Raman. After 30 minutes of walking, they arrived at a small home. But it did not even have a single lamp lighting it from outside. Instead, they could see a faint light coming from inside.



They knocked the door and entered the home. Inside, they saw an old teacher teaching several students. The study room was lit only with a single lamp. All these kids seemed to be from very poor families." The King looked at Tenali Raman in anger, and said, "Is this a joke? It looks like this man is not even celebrating Diwali. He has no decorations or lighting outside his home!"

As soon as the teacher heard the King, he got up and bowed, "Welcome to my

home your majesty. I am honored to have you here." Tenali Raman asked the teacher, "Can you tell the King what you do? And who are these children?"

The teacher replied, "Dear King, all these children are from very poor families. Their parents cannot afford to buy books for them or send them to school. Therefore, I teach these kids for free whenever I have time. Today was a holiday for me because of Diwali. Therefore I asked all these kids to come and study at my home."

Tenali Raman said to the King, "Sir, the brightest light is the light of knowledge and kindness. This man is not very wealthy. But he is giving the greatest gift to those who cannot afford to get it – the light of knowledge. Therefore, I think that this is the brightest home in the town."

The King smiled and said, "You are absolutely correct my friend! There is no light that is brighter than knowledge and kindness. And it is this brightest light that is in this home."

The King then announced that the prize money should be awarded to the teacher.

Discussion:

1. Do you think the King made the right choice in giving the prize money to the teacher?
2. How do you decorate your home on Diwali?
3. How can you show kindness like the teacher on festivals?

Story: The Most Beautiful Flowers on this Earth

One day, King Krishna Deva Raya became very sad. He stopped smiling. When anyone tried to talk to him or make him happy, the King would just walk away. His wife and ministers brought several dancers, magicians and jugglers to please him. But the King remained sad. Now, everyone was worried. They went to Tenali Raman and asked for his help.

Tenali Raman came to the palace the next morning. He requested the King to come with him for a walk in the city. He said, "Your majesty, I want to show you the most beautiful flowers that you have ever seen. When you look at them, you will really feel very happy. The King agreed. But he kept quiet throughout the walk. After sometime, they came to a park where some children were playing.

The kids were laughing and making excited sounds while playing. In a corner, a group of kids was using mud to make tiny homes, animals, mountains and birds. They were really enjoying playing with the mud. Suddenly, the King said, "When I was a little kid, I loved playing with mud. It was a lot of fun. I will join these kids and make some clay houses with them."



So, the King joined and played with the kids for almost an hour. They made a tiny village with many huts, homes, cows, bridges and other things with mud. When it was all complete, the King smiled. He looked so happy and relaxed. He said to Tenali Raman, "I really had a lot of fun! Thank you for bringing me here. I already feel so relaxed. My sadness has gone away. But now let us go and see the

most beautiful flowers that you wanted me to see."

Tenali Raman replied, "Your majesty, the most beautiful flowers on this earth are our kids. No matter how sad we are, they can bring a smile to our faces. See how happy you feel after playing with them!"

The King agreed. He said, "You are correct Tenali. Now I will visit them and play with them whenever I feel sad."

The King then ordered that all the kids in the park should be given a gift of toys. He also had several swings and slides put up in the park. And whenever he was sad, he would go to that park and play with the kids to make himself happy!

18.3 Stories of Gopal Bhar the Jester

In the 18th century in the town of Krishnanagar in West Bengal, which is in India, there lived a clever barber named Gopal. He was a very intelligent and a funny man. He always found a clever way of getting out of trouble. Sometimes, he fooled people, but they always forgave him because he made them laugh. Let us read two stories from the life of Gopal the Jester. A Jester is a person who does funny things and tricks to make others laugh.

Story: Gopal measures the Size of the Earth

One day, the, the King of Bengal announced a very strange reward. Anyone who could measure the size of the earth will get a bag of 100 gold coins. No one came forward to say that he will measure the earth and claim the prize.

When Gopal heard the announcement, he said to the King, "Your Majesty, I can measure the size of the earth. But I want my reward right now. As no one had come forward to measure the earth, the Sultan agreed. He gave the bag of 100 gold coins to Gopal grudgingly. Gopal asked for 3 months' time, so that he could get some helpers to measure the earth.

But, once he got the gold coins, Gopal started spending it on parties, for buying good clothes, furniture and enjoying good food. However, he used a few of those gold coins to buy yarns and yarns of wool and string. He also



hired a young man to write any number that came to his mind in notebook after notebook.

After three months, Gopal went to the Sultan and asked for 100 more gold coins! The Sultan got angry and said, "Why do you need more money? I already gave you 100 gold coins." Gopal replied, "Your Majesty, it is not easy to measure the earth because it is so vast. Therefore, I need 3 more months and 100 gold coins. Just imagine, you will be the first King on this earth to know the size of our earth. You will become famous all over the world. Therefore, you should give me more money." The Sultan gave him 100 more gold coins.

Once again, Gopal just partied, and paid a few coins to a teenager to keep writing numbers in notebooks. He brought some more rope and yarn, till a shed was full of all that stuff. Finally, after the time was over, he went to the Sultan and said, "I have measured the earth. All the material that I used for the calculations is in my home. If you can send about 25 empty carts pulled by bulls, I will get all the calculations for you here." The Sultan gave him the carts.

After a day, the Sultan was shocked to see the 25 cars loaded with notebooks, thread, rope, yarns and so on. Gopal said, "Your Majesty, I used ropes, thread and wool to measure the earth. Then we wrote all these measurements in these notebooks. Please ask your mathematician to add them up." The Sultan said, "But this will take months. How can I be sure that you have measured the earth correctly?"

Gopal said, "Give me 100 more gold coins and I will add them up myself." The King did not want to give more money. So he said, "I trust you Gopal. I believe that you measured the earth correctly. But I do not want to give you more money. You can just keep the 200 gold coins that I gave you earlier." Gopal chuckled and smiled. He had made a fool of the Sultan and had used his 200 gold coins to party and buy all kinds of stuff for his home!

Story: Gopal and his friends eat free Rasagullas



name then? Tell me and I will ask my father."

The children of the village in which Gopal lived loved him. He often joined them in their pranks. One day, the children came to Gopal and made a funny request.

They said, "The sweet shop of Bhola sells delicious Rasagullas, but we do not have money to buy them. Can you help us?"

Gopal agreed. He went to the shop just after Bhola had left to take his afternoon nap. He asked his little son to take care of the shop while he took the nap in the room inside.

Gopal immediately entered the shop and started eating the Rasagullas. Bhola's son said, "Stop, do not steal in our shop."

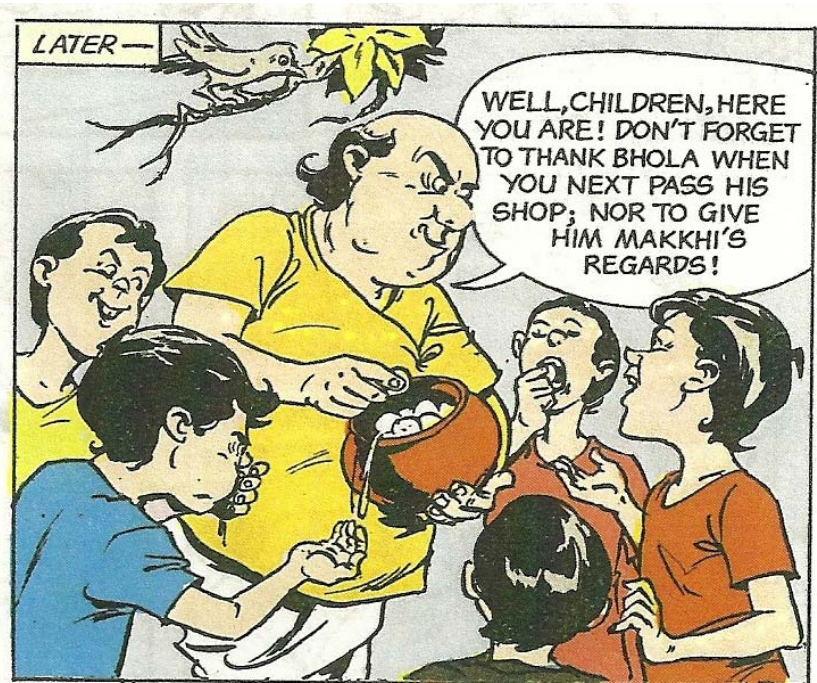
Gopal replied, "Ask your father. I come here all the time and he allows me to eat for free." The boy asked, "What is your

Gopal said, "Tell your Dad that I am Makkhi." [Makkhi means a 'fly']. The little boy did not understand the joke. He rushed to the room where his Dad Bhola was sleeping and said, "Father, a Makkhi is eating all the Rasagullas."

Bhola was already half asleep and got very irritated. He shouted back at his son and said, "You fool, get out. Do not wake me up just because a Makkhi is eating the Rasagullas. Let the Makkhi eat as much as it wants." Then, Bhola went back to sleep.

When the boy came out, Gopal said, "Did I not tell you? Your father would not mind me eating your Rasagullas!" The boy just kept quiet.

Gopal picked the whole jar of Rasagullas and took it to his children friends. They all had a party, and ate the Rasagullas to their heart's content!



19. Saintly Bhaktas of the Devi

19.1 Seeing the Devi in Everyone: Sant Thayumanavar (1705 – 1742 CE)



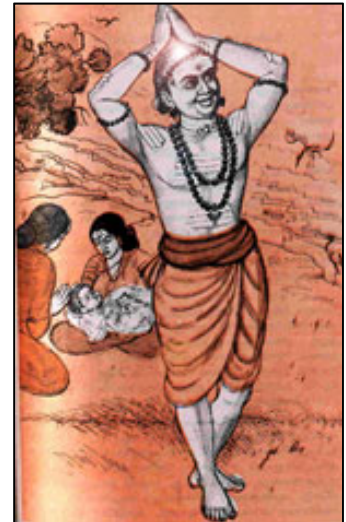
Once, the Raja of Vijayanagar was returning after worshipping Ganesha and Devi in the hill-top temple in the town of Tiruchi, when he saw Thayumanavar on the roadside lost in meditation. The Raja waited for the saint to come out of his meditation, and thereafter, sought his blessings. Then, calling his attendant, the Raja said, “It is very cold today. I want you to bring the most expensive Kashmiri shawl that we have, and give it as an offering to the Saint.” The attendant brought the shawl and the Raja reverentially wrapped it around the body of the Saint, and then left for his palace.

The next day, as the Saint was walking by the market place, he saw an untouchable poor girl trembling with cold. The Saint immediately took off

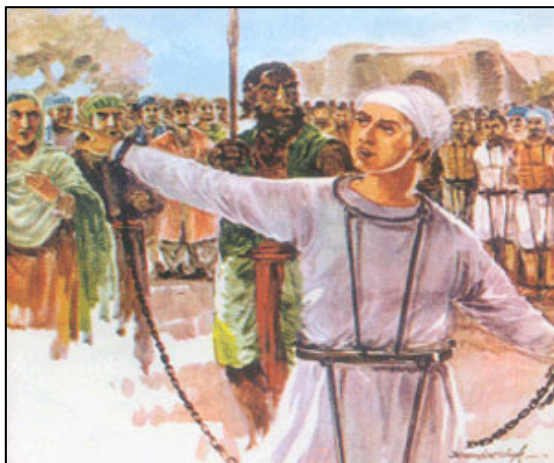
his shawl, and wrapped it around the girl saying, “Mother, you need it more than I do.” When the word of this incident reached the Raja, he became very angry and said, “I had given a very precious shawl to the Saint with a lot of respect. How dare he re-gift it to someone, and that too, to a miserly poor girl? I want the Saint to be produced in front of me in my court so that he can explain his insulting behavior.”

When the Saint came to the court and was asked to explain his behavior, he said, “King, you gave the shawl to me because you had thought of me as superior to you. Likewise, I gave the shawl to that girl because she is superior to me.” The Raja was perplexed. “How can that wretched girl be superior to you” he asked.

The Saint replied, “Devi Ma resides in everyone’s heart. To me, that girl was none other than the Devi. And therefore, I gave the shawl to her. You should actually feel blessed that your gift has reached none other than the Devi.” When the Raja heard this explanation, he greatly repented and fell at the feet of the Saint, asking for forgiveness. He realized that Bhagavān resides in the heart of every human being, and therefore we should serve and respect every person as if he were a reflection of Bhagavān.



19.2 Haqiqat Rai Puri:



In the early 18th cent CE in the city of Sialkot (now in Pakistan), a teenager boy Haqiqat Rai Puri (b. 1724 to Durga Devi and Bhagmal) was playing with his Muslim friends. Suddenly, a friend began to taunt him over his Hindu faith, and ridiculed the Devi. Haqiqat Rai warned him not to say another abusive word against the Devi, but his friend persisted.

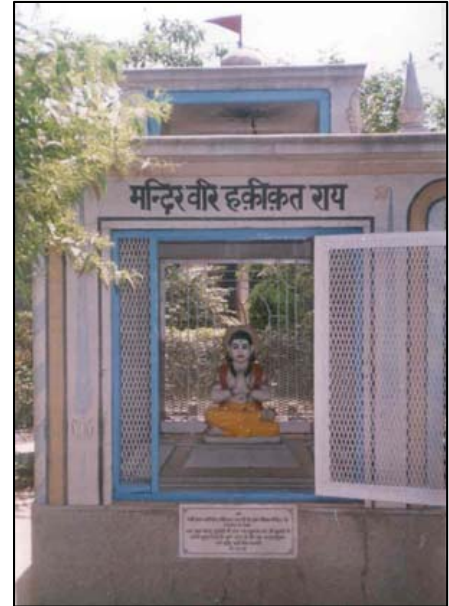
Haqiqat Rai became angry, and he too counter-abused his friend by making an abusive comment against the daughter of Prophet Muhammad. The word of this incident reached the ears of the Qazi (the Muslim magistrate) of Sialkot. Haqiqat Rai was summoned to Lahore and upon confessing his crime, he was given the choice of conversion to Islam or death by the governor

of the province.

Haqiqat Rai's parents rushed to the scene and they begged their teenaged boy to convert to Islam. They reminded him that he had been married recently and they did not want to see his wife widowed. But Haqiqat Rai refused to convert. As a result, he was executed on the day of Basant Panchami festival (20th January 1735). His blood drenched clothes became deep orange/red in color ('basanti') and this scene is later said to have inspired the Punjabi song "Mera rang de basanti chola" used by Indian freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh as their rallying call.

This incident caused a great consternation among the Hindus of the region. A Samadhi (mausoleum) was constructed in his memory at the site of his funeral. The Hindus of Lahore started the annual kite-flying festival in his memory on the day of the Basant Panchami festival. The festival caught on and became very popular. An annual fair began to be organized on the day of the festival in the memory of the brave Hindu boy who gave up his life but not his religion.

Today, even though there are no Hindus left in Lahore, the festival of kite flying on Basant Panchami is still celebrated. However, the local Muslims no longer pay homage to the Samadhi of Rai. His wife died several years later and was cremated at Batala, a city that is now in India. Today, a shrine has been constructed at her Samadhi in the memory of Haqiqat Rai.



19.3 Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836 – 1886 CE)

Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa was born as Gadādhara Chattopadhyāy in 1836 at a place called Kamarpukur in West Bengal (India). Right from his childhood, he was very spiritual and showed many saintly qualities. Some inspiring anecdotes from his life are given below.

Story: Do not disrespect your employees just because they are poor

Some people look down others who are poor or whose life has taken an economic downturn. These rich and arrogant people think that others are poor because they are either lazy or because they are not as intelligent and clever as they are. However, the lives of our Sants demonstrate how we should treat the poor equally with the rich. A story from the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is given below.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa was taken care of a maidservant in his childhood. The little boy was very fond of his maid. One day, when he was three years old, he promised her saying, "When I undergo my thread-ceremony, I will take my first food from you." The maid smiled and ignored Ramakrishna's promise as childish prattle. After the thread ceremony is over, Hindu tradition requires that the child with the sacred thread should beg his first five meals from five individuals. Typically, these are his mother and his aunts, followed by other elderly and respectable individuals in the family and neighborhood.

Four years later, when Ramakrishna was seven years old, he underwent the sacred thread ceremony. After the ceremony was over, he was asked to beg his first meal. Ramakrishna said, "Please call my dear Dhaadi (respectable word for one's elderly governess). I will take my first meal from her hands."



All the family members present there were surprised and said, “Son, beg your meal from your own Aunts or mother. Your Dhaadi is just a poor maid, and she is not from a very respectable family.”

But Ramakrishna replied, “I had promised her when I was three years old that I will beg my first meal from her!” The elders replied, “You were just a kid then, and you are a kid even now. Kids do not have to keep their promises because they do not think before they promise something.”

But Ramakrishna replied, “I have undergone this sacred thread ceremony because this means I will start studying religious books from now on, and will follow all religious customs. But now, if I do not even keep my promise, then am I not disobeying my Dharma? Our Dharma teaches us to be truthful and to keep our promises. Therefore, of what use is this sacred thread if I disobey Dharma? I insist that I will beg my first meal from my Dhaadi, and from no one else.”

The people present there were moved by little Gadadhar’s determination, and allowed him to beg his first meal from the maidservant, ignoring that she was poor and humble.

Story: The Greatness of saints is in their simplicity, not in their appearances

Dr. Mahendranath Sarkar, a renowned physician of Kolkata, once went to the Dakshineswar temple to see Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa for the first time. On his way to the Swami’s room of the Swami that was located in the temple complex, the physician stopped in the temple gardens.

He saw a man taking a stroll. Taking him to be a gardener, Sarkar asked him, “I am on my way to meet the great Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I wish to gift him a bouquet of flowers. Can you pluck some for me?” The man obliged and soon got him a few flowers.

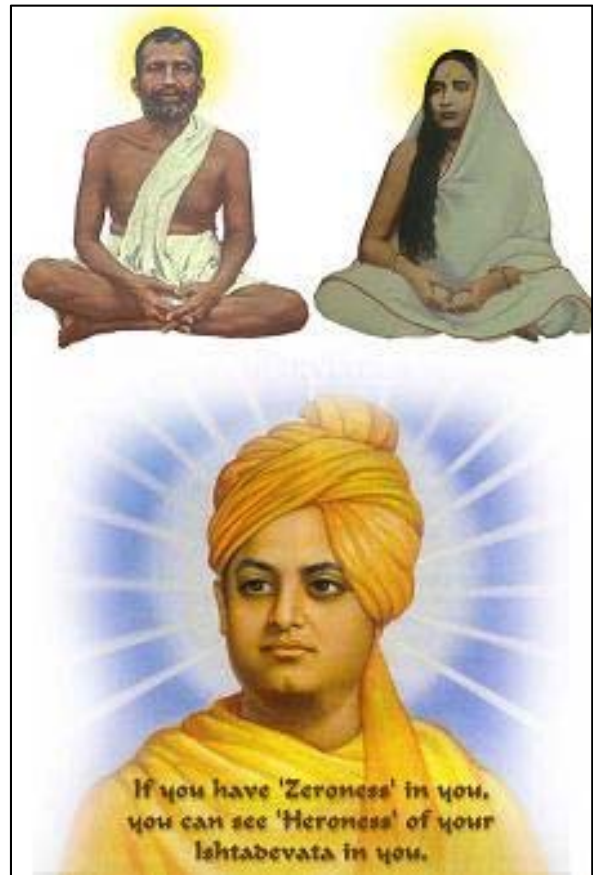
Later on, when the physician arrived to listen to the sermon of the Swami, he was shocked to find that the man he had thought of as a gardener was none other than the Swami!

Story: How did Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa meet Swami Vivekananda?

Naren was a very inquisitive person. He believed that all religions are false and that God does not exist. He asked scholars of several religions if they had yet seen God. But they all said that they have not, but were trying to see him. Naren was convinced that God does not exist at all.

One day, at someone’s advice, he went to see Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. As soon as he entered the Swami’s room, the latter got up and rushed to embrace Naren with a smile on his face. Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa said, “Where were you hiding all along? I have been waiting for you since so long!” Naren was surprised because he had never met Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa before.

Later, he asked the Swami, “Have you seen God.” To his surprise, Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa replied, “Of course, I have seen Ma Kālī. But the difference is that I can see her more clearly than I can see you.” Then, he took Naren to another room inside. As both sat down, Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa touched Naren with his foot. Naren felt an electric shock pass through his body and had a Divine experience. Due to the touch of the Swami, Naren saw the entire Universe swirling before him, and also saw a glimpse of Bhagavān. Naren was convinced that Bhagavān indeed exists. He accepted Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa as his Guru.

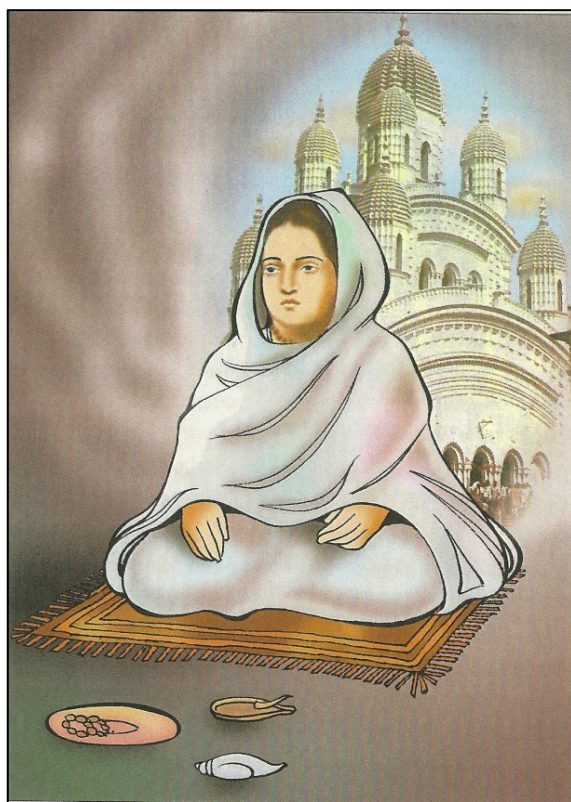


Subsequently, Naren became a Sannyāsī and came to be known as Swami Vivekananda. He is credited with having brought the teachings of Hindu Dharma to the United States. He attributed his success to the blessings of his Divine Guru Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

19.4 Rani Rasmani

Rani Rasmani (1793-1861) was born in a poor home but married to a rich landlord named Rajchandra. She had three daughters from the marriage. She lived a very simple life even though she was now rich. Impressed by her intelligence, her husband made it a habit to consult her in every important matter. As a result, their estate started earning a lot of money.

After the death of her husband in 1836, Rasmani devoted herself to philanthropy. She noticed that the journey of Hindu pilgrims from Kolkata to the famous Jagannatha Temple was very arduous due to the lack of a proper highway. So she spent money to get a long road constructed from the Subarnarekha river to Puri. She also repaired the sacred steps ('ghats') on the banks of the Bhāgīrathī river (tributary of Ganga flowing past Kolkata) and made handsome endowments to the Hindu College (now called The Presidency College) and the Imperial Library (now called The National Library) in Kolkata.



The British East India Company levied a heavy tax on the fishermen who earned their livelihood from the Hooghly river. They petitioned the Company but to no avail. Rani Rasmani decided to help them. She leased a portion of the river and then constructed huge barricades across the river, to prevent the motion of the trade and cargo ships of the Company.

When they asked her to remove the barricades, she replied, "I have leased the river and can do whatever I want. Your ships disturb the fish in my portion of the river, and cause them to spawn prematurely. As a result, the yield of fish caught by the fishermen who are my tenants is decreasing. Hence, I will not remove the barricades."

The British then agreed to remove the tax on the fisherman, to compensate on the loss of their fish catch. Rasmani then removed the barricades. It was great courage on her part to stand up to the all-powerful East India Company in those days.

One day, a band of ruffian Company soldiers attacked her estate after they had a brawl with some of the gatekeepers. The Rani immediately stood guard at the gate of the Rama temple in her estate and challenged the soldiers to face her before they touched the temple. Soon, the soldiers left.

Once when the Rani was on her way to a pilgrimage to Varanasi, Goddess Kali appeared to her in a dream and asked the Rani to return to Kolkata and construct a temple in that town. Thus was built the famous Dakshineswar temple a few miles north of Kolkata. She appointed Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa as the priest of the Mandir, and entrusted its management to her son-in-law Mathur Babu. The rest is history, and soon Sri Ramakrishna's fame as a great saint spread far and wide.

One day, she got distracted and started thinking about a business deal when Sri Ramakrishna was singing a bhajan. He immediately slapped her. Her attendants rushed to hit Sri Ramakrishna, but she stopped them immediately and said, "Ma Kali has herself punished me through Sri Ramakrishna for my inattentiveness."

Towards the last years of her life, she retired from active life to spend her time in spiritual and religious activities. She listened to the advice of Ramakrishna on these matters till her death. We can say therefore that it was her patronage that gave India one of her greatest Saints – Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

19.4 Sadhu Nag Mahashay – The Karma yogi Householder

Durgacharan Nag, later famous as Sadhu Nag Mahashay, was born on 21st August 1846 at Deobhog, a small village in Narayanganj district in Bangladesh. His mother passed when he was eight years old, and he was raised thereafter by his father and his Aunt (father's sister). She used to narrate stories from Hindu scriptures to the child. Nag Mahashay became very spiritually inclined in his childhood itself.

He went to college and became a medical doctor, a very lucrative profession in those days. However, he always lived a very simple life. He never wore expensive clothes, and always travelled on foot if a vehicle was needed. One day, his father brought him expensive clothes befitting a physician. But Nag Mahashay said, "Father, there was no need to have purchased these expensive clothes. Instead, you could have used this money to help a poor person."

He treated all his poor patients for free, and even gave them travel expenses. Many stories are narrated about how he lived as an ideal householder. Once, he went to see a poor patient and noticed that in the bitter cold, the patient had no blanket and lived in a dilapidated home. Nag Mahashay immediately took off his expensive shawl and covered his patient's body with it. Another time, he went to see a patient and found him to be so poor that he did not even have a cot to sleep on. The patient was in great discomfort, as he had to sleep on a hard floor. Nag Mahashay went home and brought his own cot as a gift to the patient.

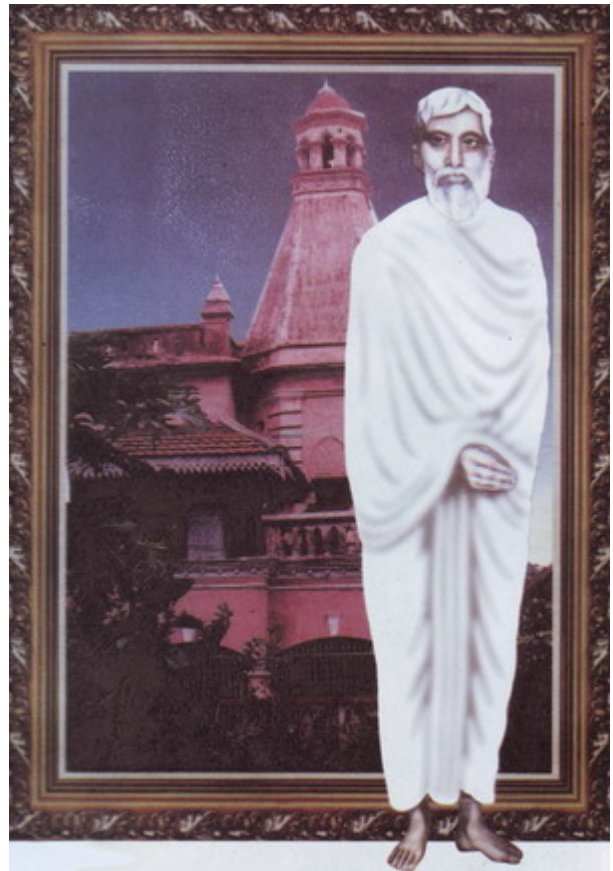
Once, he went to treat a kid who was ill with influenza. In those days, people often died with flu. Despite his best efforts, the kid died, even though he spent the whole day looking after the boy. The parents of the boy thought that the physician will bill them for spending the entire day with their child. Instead, Nag Mahashay left with tears in his eyes and said, "I am sorry that I could not save your only child!"

Nag Mahashay was very hospitable to his guests, following the Hindu teaching that a guest is as honorable as Bhagavān. He never let his guests leave without offering them food or drink, even when was sick himself. Once, a few guests arrived when it was pouring heavily outside. They wanted to spend a night in his home. Unfortunately, there was only one room in his home whose roof did not leak water. He said to his wife, "Let us give that room to the guests. You and I will stay in the other room that leaks." His wife gladly agreed and the couple spent their night in the other room, getting wet due to the leakage.

One day, he treated a lady from a very wealthy family. The family offered him a lot of money in gratitude. But Nag Mahashay said, "You owe me only Rupees 2 per day for seven days of treatment, plus Rupees six for medicines. I will not take more than twenty rupees because that is all you owe to me." He returned the extra money to them.

Nag Mahashay always liked to do his own work and therefore did not keep any servants. When he went to the river bank to take a ferry service, he never let the boatman row the boat. He took the oars in his own hand but nevertheless gave the boatman's fee to him.

He was a very compassionate person. Eating fish and meat is fairly common in Bengal, but Nag Mahashay lived as a pure vegetarian. One day, he saw a British man take aim at some birds with his gun. As the first shot was fired, the flocks of birds flew away in terror. As the British officer took his aim again, Nag Mahashay approached him and asked him not to kill innocent birds. When the officer did not listen, Nag Mahashay scolded him in a loud voice and snatched the gun from him. Later, he had the gun sent to the officer through a factory worker. When the British



officer heard of Mahashay's virtuous character from the worker, he dropped all ideas of filing a lawsuit against Nag Mahashay. Close to his home was a pond. Whenever a fisherman caught fish from it, Nag Mahashay would buy all the fish and then promptly release it back into the pond.

Nag Mahashay was one of the favorite students of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The Sant used to say that Nag Mahashay is like Raja Janaka, who lived a spiritual life even as a householder because he was detached from the allurements of this material world. Swami Vivekananda too once remarked that of all the disciples of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa, it was Nag Mahashay alone who had understood their Guru's message.

Nag Mahashay passed away on 27th December 1899. Today, a shrine stands at the site of his original home in Deobhog.

19.5 Swami Vivekananda: He Took Hindu Dharma to the West



Swami Vivekananda is credited with spreading the message of the Vedanta Hindu philosophy in the West, and also among the educated in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Although he lived a mere 39 years (1863 – 1902 CE), he achieved and contributed more than most of us will in several lifetimes. In the memory of his Guru, Swami Vivekananda founded a Hindu organization called 'The Ramakrishna Mission' in 1897. Today, the mission has hundreds of centers all over the world to provide food and other types of help to the poor, and to spread the message of Hindu Dharma.

The detailed life story of Swami Vivekananda, and his Guru Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa provide a lot of inspiration to us Hindus, as well as to non-Hindus. Below are a few anecdotes from their lives to indicate their great personalities.

Story: What did Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa & Swami Vivekananda ask Devi Kali for?

Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one of the greatest devotees of Mother Kali. He treated Kali as her real mother. He went to Her temples and sang in front of Her mūrti, and spoke to Her, cried in front of Her, just like a child behaves towards his mother. One of his main disciples was Naren, who later became famous as Swami Vivekananda.

Naren was the only son of his widowed mother. They were very poor. One day his mother said to Naren, "Why do you spend all your time worshipping Bhagavān. What has He given you? He cannot even make sure that we have some money to live comfortably."

This troubled Vivekananda a lot. Therefore, he approached Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa and asked him, "You say that Kali is your mother. I and my mother are very poor. Do you think Kali will fulfill my wishes and give me money if I pray to her?"

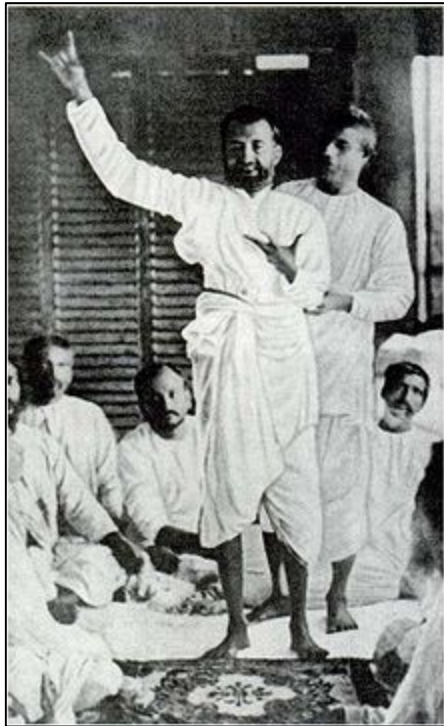
Ramakrishna replied, "Of course, my child. She is very loving. Why don't you ask her for whatever you need? Go, and ask her for some money so that you are no longer poor." Naren then went to the Kali Mandir. But when he entered the Mandir, he became full of devotion and respect for Kali. Instead of asking for money, he said to Kali, "Mother, please give me spiritual knowledge, and devotion. May I never forget You, and may I always love You as my Mother."

When Ramakrishna learned that Naren had not asked



for money, he asked him to go to the Mandir again. But this time, Naren just sat there and meditated. Ramakrishna sent him back to the Mandir a couple of more times. But each time, Naren would meditate and worship Kali and would not ask for money. He felt that money was too unimportant to ask from Kali, the Mother of the Universe.

So, Ramakrishna himself went to the Mandir and asked his Mother to make sure that Naren's family no longer went hungry. Since that day, the Naren and his mother started making enough money for their food. They were never poor after that, but they never became rich either. In the next few years, Naren became a saint himself, and his new name now was Swami Vivekananda.



Several years later, Ramakrishna Paramahansa himself fell very sick. The doctors said that he has throat cancer and that he will not live very long. The disciples and other admirers of Ramakrishna were shocked. They could not believe that a saint like him could die of cancer. Therefore, they approached the saint and pleaded, "You say that Kali is like your mother. Why don't you ask her to cure your cancer? She will surely listen to the request of a saint like you, who is also her dear son." Ramakrishna said that he did not want to ask his Mother Kali for anything. He had earlier asked Kali to give money to Naren's family, but he did not want anything for himself.

But Ramakrishna's disciples continued to pressure him. Therefore, the saint finally agreed and prayed to Mother Kali. Next day, the disciples approached Ramakrishna eagerly and asked him, 'Swamiji, did you ask Ma Kali to cure you?' The saint replied and said, "Yes, I asked her to cure my cancer. But she replied – "Why do you ask me for such a trivial thing? Your body will die one day anyway. Ask for something more valuable." So, I felt ashamed and asked her that I should always live at her feet. I asked her to make sure that I always remain her devotee."

When the disciples heard Ramakrishna say these words, they wept. They knew that their Guru will soon die. But they felt happy and blessed that they were looking at a great saint, who valued bhakti for Ma Kali more

than his own life!

Story: Dharma is our True Mother

A biography⁴² of Swami Vivekananda notes his response to Christian missionary intolerance towards Hinduism:

"There were on the boat, among other passengers, two Christian missionaries who, in the course of a heated discussion with the Swami, lost their tempers and savagely criticized the Hindu religion. The Swami walked to one of them, seized him by the collar, and said menacingly, 'If you abuse my religion again, I will throw you overboard.'

'Let me go, sir,' the frightened missionary apologized; 'I'll never do it again.'

Later, in the course of a conversation with a disciple in Calcutta, he asked, 'What would you do if someone insulted your mother?' The disciple answered, 'I would fall upon him, sir, and teach him a good lesson.'

'Bravo!' said the Swami. 'Now, if you had the same positive feeling toward your religion, your true mother, you could never see any Hindu brother converted to Christianity. Yet you see this occurring every day, and you are quite indifferent. Where is your faith? Where is your patriotism? Every day Christian missionaries abuse Hinduism to your face, and yet how many are there amongst you whose blood boils with righteous indignation and who will stand up in its defense?'"

⁴² Quoted in Sharma (1997), pp. 73-74

Story: Swami Vivekananda defends the Hindu tradition of Mūrti Pūjā

Once, Swami Vivekananda arrived at Alwar during one of his tours. The Prime Minister of the kingdom kept him in his house as a guest, being impressed by the Swami's personality, learning and spirituality. He invited the



Maharaja to listen to the discourses of the Swami and benefit from his wisdom.

The Maharaja said to the Swami, "My forefathers had consecrated an image of Shri Krishna inside the palace. But I do not worship it because I do not have faith in idol worship. Don't you think that idol worship is harmful?"

Swamiji thought for a while and then asked some persons to get a picture of the Maharaja to the gathering. Then, he asked people to spit on

it. Everyone was aghast. They said to Swamiji, "How can you ask us to spit on this picture? It is of the Maharaja whom we all revere and respect."

Swamiji smiled and said to the Maharaja, "Did you see how no one wants to spit on this picture? The picture is not the same as you. It is merely a painting of you on a piece of paper. Yet, it symbolizes you and represents you which is why no one wants to spit on it. These same people who have refused to spit on this picture have no problems spitting into the expensive silver and gold spittoons kept in the Dewan's house. Similarly, the image of Shri Krishna reminds the worshipper of the Lord whom it represents. The worshipper knows that the image is not the same as the Lord, but this image reminds him of the Lord whom he worships in his heart. And when he offers worship to this image, he is offering worship to Shri Krishna that the image represents."

The Maharaja learned his lesson about the rationale behind idol worship and promised Swamiji that he will not henceforth look down upon 'mūrti pūjā'.

Story: Swami Vivekananda teaches the true value of Wealth to a Student

"Swami Vivekananda was sailing to America for the second time. He met an Indian student in the ship who was going to America for higher studies. He looked very sophisticated and behaved arrogantly, as very few people went abroad those days. Swami Vivekananda thought that this would be the right time to give him proper values in life. So one evening, when they met on the deck, Swamiji asked the student, "Son, what are you going to America for?"



"I am going for higher studies, Sir. It will take four to five years."

"Then what will happen?"

"I will return to India. I am sure to get a very good job and earn a lot of money."

"Then?"

"Then?" The student was surprised. Was the Swami so ignorant that he did not know the value of money? "Then Sir, I shall be the most fortunate person. All the fathers of marriageable girls will come to me with proposals. I will be in a position to dictate my own terms and marry the girl of my choice. They will give a substantial dowry too!"

"Then?"

The student felt irritated by these questions, but he did not show it. However, he answered impatiently, "Then Sir, we will live together, and have children. I shall be a big officer, with a huge bungalow to live in and a car too. My children will get the best education, and all opportunities to do well in life. The daughters will make good matches and the sons may even go abroad like me for higher studies and get good jobs."

"Then?"

Now the student was certain that the Swami was mocking him. He looked at his face to see his expression, but the Swami's face was dead-pan. So suppressing his mounting irritation, the student replied, "Sir, by the time my children are settled in life, I shall be nearing the age of retirement. So I will build a small house in my village, and live there after retirement. I will get a good pension and manage to live quite comfortably."

"Then?"

The student angrily lost control over himself this time. He retorted angrily, "Then? What sort of questions do you ask, Sir! What more is there to say? Then one day I will die."

The Swami smiled calmly and said, "If it is only to earn, eat, produce children and then one day die, what is human life worth? Are not the animals doing the same without foreign education? Are not the birds doing the same without schooling? Are not the fish doing the same thing without high salaries and bungalows? Birth and death are common to all beings."

No doubt one should live a decent life, but one should always have high ideals. It is fine to have money and position but they are only worthwhile if used in the service of others."

The student felt very ashamed and from that day onwards resolved to lead a purposeful life in the service of the society."⁴³

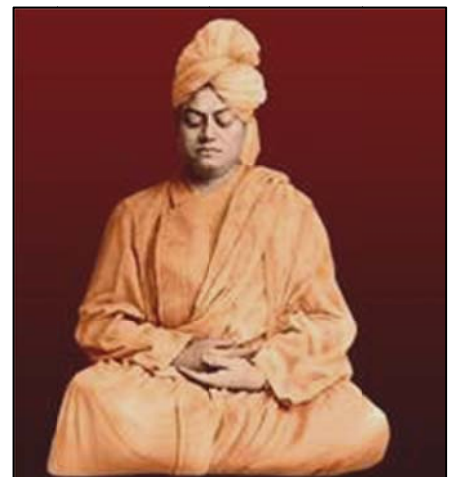
Story: Do not Tempt Others

"After Swami Vivekananda had started organizing his work in America in order to popularize Vedanta in that country, he asked some of his brother monks to come and help him in that work. When they arrived in America, Vivekananda initiated them into the ways and customs of American life. One of the new monks had the habit of leaving his wrist watch on the table after coming back from his classes and lectures. Swami Vivekananda had asked him on several occasions to keep the watch in a drawer but the young monk used to forget to follow his advice. One day Swami Vivekananda told him, "I know, my dear brother, you care very little for the wrist watch, but do you not realize that by leaving the watch on the table, you may be tempting someone to commit a theft?"⁴⁴

Story: The Power of Meditation:

One day a disciple found Swami Vivekananda turning over the pages of a volume so fast that he thought that the Swami must be looking merely at the pictures. He asked the Swami whether he was looking at the pictures in the book.

Swami Vivekananda replied, "No, I am reading." The disciple said, "That requires attention, but you have been turning over the pages at the rate of a page per minute." The Swami then said, "No, I have been reading each page and have finished 11 volumes on the shelf. If you don't believe



⁴³ Swami Chinmayananda and Swamini Sharada Priyananda, pp. 3-5

⁴⁴ Swami Sambuddhananda, p. 43

me you can ask me questions concerning any subject matter dealt with in the 11 volumes”

The disciple then started putting questions and Swami Vivekananda answered all the questions correctly. The disciple asked how it was possible for the Swami to read big volumes so quickly.

Swami Vivekananda replied, “It is possible for a Yogi who has observed the vow of continence scrupulously. When a boy is reading, his attention is first fixed on the letters composing a word and he learns how to pronounce a word. With more practice, a man does not look at each separate letter or the word itself, and by such practice, a reader can read a few words together at the same time. Similarly, it is possible to take in a whole sentence at a time. But if a man who has absolute self-control and continence concentrates his mind on the page, he can read a whole paragraph at one time; and later he will be capable of reading a whole page in this manner when the power of concentration increases.....”

Story: Face your Difficulties and do not run away from them

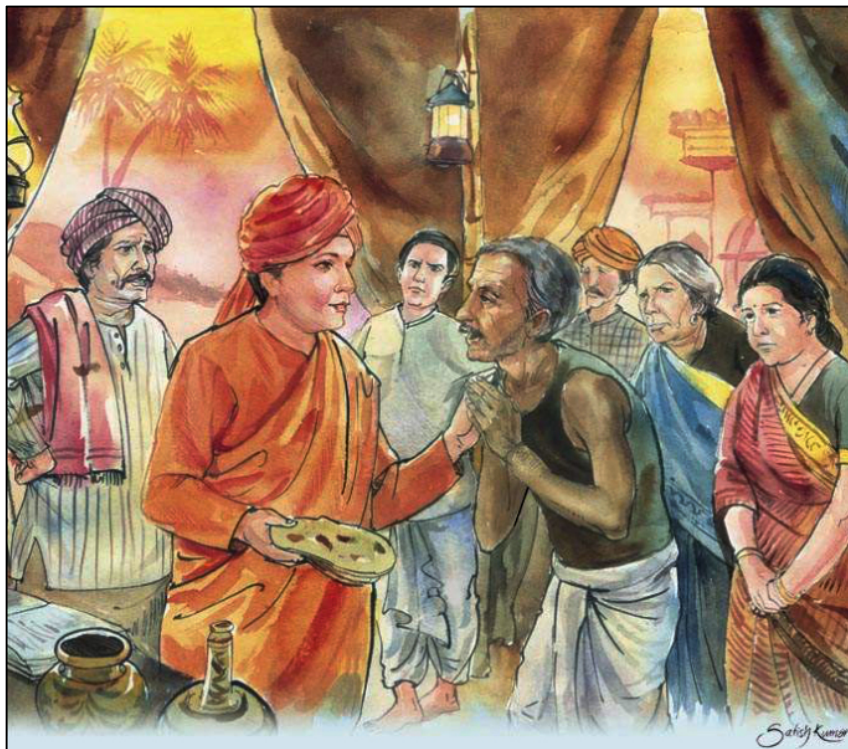
Once Swami Vivekananda, as an itinerant monk happened to pass through some lonely forest near the city of Banaras. He suddenly found himself surrounded by a large band of monkeys. Not having even a staff in his hand to scare the monkeys away, he could think of no means of escaping from the monkeys except to run away. As he began to run, the monkeys also in their hundreds began to run after him.

The Swami felt exhausted and helpless, when he suddenly heard the words, “Flee not but face the trouble. Face it and it will flee from you.” He stopped running at once and turning back faced the monkeys, when all of them appeared to get nonplussed, and then they started running away.

This episode from the life of the Swami teaches us that we should not run away scared from our problems like a coward. Instead, we should face them and overcome them.

Story: The Joy of Giving

“During his stay in America, Swami Vivekananda generally cooked his own meals. When there were other persons around in his house during mealtime, Swami Ji first served food to his guests before taking meals.



One day when Vivekananda was about to take his meals, a group of boys rang the bell.

Welcoming the children in, Swami Ji enquired whether they had taken their meals.

The boys told him that they had not eaten anything and were feeling hungry. Vivekananda asked the boys to take meals at his house.

However, because he had prepared the food for himself only, nothing was left for him after the guests had eaten.

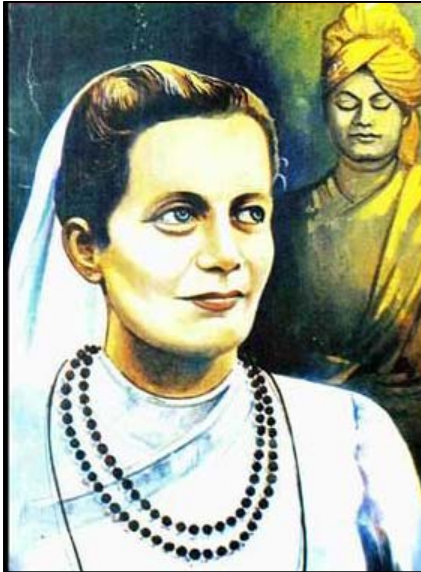
Nevertheless, Vivekananda appeared very happy and satisfied.

An American lady, present in the house at that time was surprised at the reaction of Vivekananda.

She queried, “When there was not sufficient food why did you invite the boys to take food at your home?”

Vivekananda replied, "The need of the soul is greater than the hunger of the body. If I had taken meals myself, while there were hungry persons around me, my soul would never have forgiven me for my selfishness. By feeding these hungry children, I satisfied the hunger of my soul. The memory of satisfaction on the faces of these hungry children after they had taken meals will always make me happy."⁴⁵

19.6 Sister Nivedita: Ideal Student of an Ideal Guru



Swami Vivekananda inspired numerous young men and women all over the world to spread the message of Hindu Dharma. Below is a story of an Irish lady who gave up her country, her home and her religion to become his follower, and dedicated her life to Hindu Dharma, and to India.

Margaret Elizabeth Noble (1867-1911) was born in Ireland but moved to England in her teenage years to work as a teacher so that she could support her family financially. She happened to hear Swami Vivekananda's discourses on Hindu Dharma in London and several other places and was very impressed by his teachings.

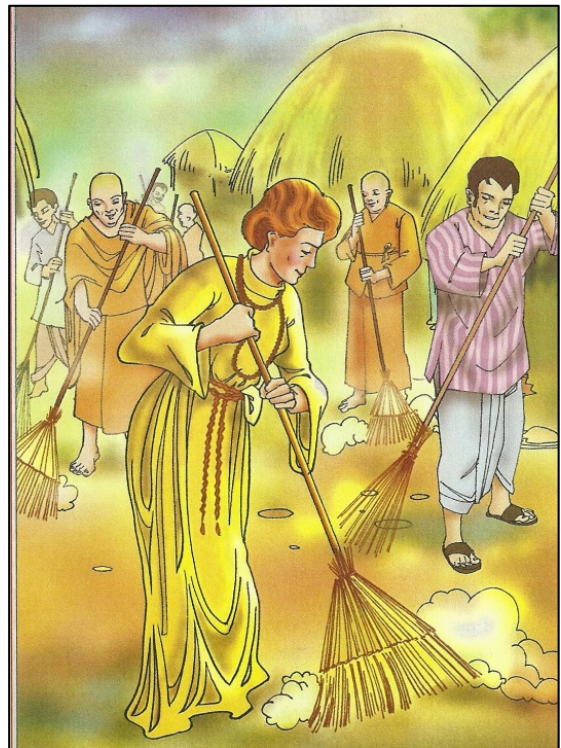
In her mind, she decided that India was her true motherland, and Hindu Dharma her religion. She wrote to Swamiji asking him if she could follow him to India, and become his disciple. In those days, England ruled over India, and therefore the English considered Indians as an inferior race.

Swami Vivekananda tried to dissuade her saying that the living conditions, poverty and the climate in India were too harsh for her. But she

did not give up and finally he agreed. In India, Swami Vivekananda initiated her into Brahmacharya (lifelong celibacy, or a life without marriage), and she now had a new name – Bhagini Nivedita (Sister Nivedita). The word 'Nivedita' means 'dedicated'.

Nivedita chose to live in a very poor neighborhood of Calcutta, which was then the capital of the British Empire in India. She completely immersed herself in Hindu culture, served the Indian society with full commitment. In 1899, the dreaded bubonic plague broke out in Calcutta and many people started dying of disease. Nivedita was pained to see that the local residents were not doing anything to clean up and fight the epidemic because they considered it as dirty work that was beneath their dignity. Undeterred, she started rescue operations, and started cleaning the roads, drains and garbage heaps with brooms herself.

The local youth saw her in action and felt ashamed at their own indifference and callous behavior. They were greatly inspired by her sense of service and soon joined her in large numbers to clean the city. With a lot of help now available, Nivedita still did not give up doing the most dangerous and dirty jobs, and she continued disinfecting the huts, and whitewashing them. She even used the small amounts of money meant for her food to save it for medicines for the victims of plague.



Later, in the year 1906, a dreaded famine broke out in Bengal. Once again, Sister Nivedita was at the forefront in doing relief work, providing food to the hungry and transporting food to the famine struck areas.

⁴⁵ Pandit Ram Sharma Acharya, pp. 40-41

Sister Nivedita wrote numerous books to make Hindu Dharma more comprehensible to westerners. She worked a lot for women emancipation in India. In her later years, she also dedicated herself to promoting Bengali art when she saw that the educated people of Bengal had started disowning their own heritage and adopting English arts instead. Whatever she did, she did with a complete sense of dedication.



After Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902, Sister Nivedita felt that a regeneration of India was not possible without political freedom. Therefore, she travelled across the Indian subcontinent to strengthen and participate in different movements which aimed at overthrowing the British rule. Many Indian freedom fighters like the great Subramania Bharati and Rashbehari Bose acknowledged her as their Guru in motivating them to fight for India's freedom. She also started a school in Kolkata, which is today known as Sister Nivedita's Girls High School.



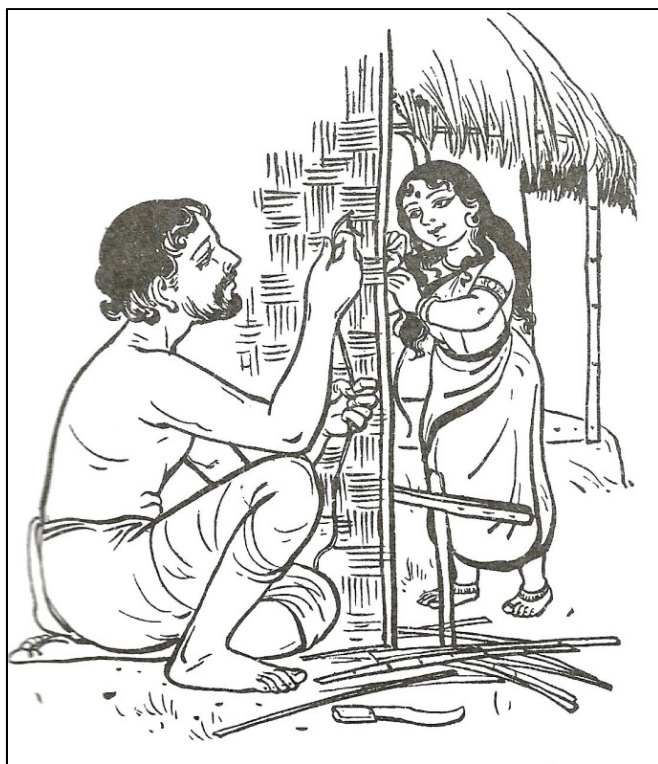
Not once did she write any letter to the newspaper or any other piece of writing highlighting her social service, or in order to gain publicity. She wholeheartedly gave her soul to Mother India, and Hindu Dharma, and passed away at the young age of 44 years in Darjeeling, India, far away from her home country. A memorial at the site where she was cremated reads, "Here reposes Sister Nivedita who gave her all to India."

Impressed by her services to the Hindu society, and her commitment to our Dharma despite having been born a Christian in Ireland, some Hindus believe that she was an Avatar of Renukā, the mother of Bhagavān Parashurama. The government of India has issued a postal stamp in her honor.

19.7 Rāmprasād Sen

The worshippers of Bhagavān as the Devi particularly follow the Apatya Bhāva and regard the Devi as their Mother. An example of this Bhāva are Sant Ramprasad (1723 – 1803 CE). He was born to a father who was an Āyurvedic physician in district in southern West Bengal, a state in India. In his childhood, Ramprasad studied grammar and other arts but showed no interest in professional subjects. As a result, his father was worried that he would not be able to get a well-paying job as an adult. Ramprasad preferred to spend most of his time worshipping Devi and composing reverent songs in her praise.

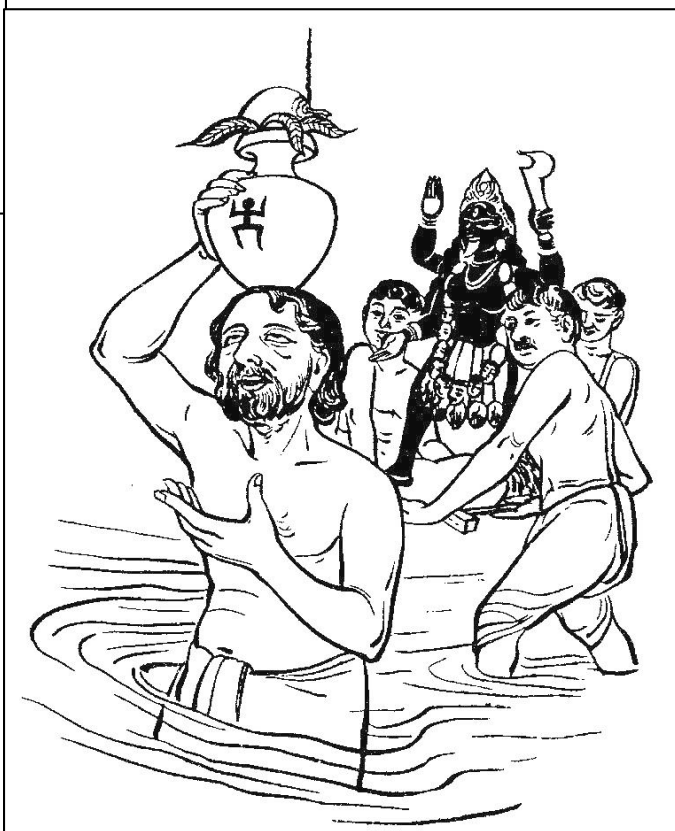
When Ramprasad's father died, the financial responsibility of the entire family fell on his shoulders. Reluctantly, he took up the job of a clerk at the home of a rich man in Kolkata. Soon his boss heard complaints that Ramprasad was mismanaging the accounts. When the boss asked Ramprasad to show his account books, he was moved to read beautiful religious poetry that Ramdas had written in the honor of the Devi. The rich man said to Ramprasad, "It was my good fortune that you worked at my home. However, I would not want you to waste time in these worldly matters. Please return to your home and spend your entire time in composing religious poetry to the Mother, and I will send you your salary every month."



intense in his worship of the Divine Mother. She once came in the guise of his daughter to help him complete some repairs at his home. At another time, she left a message on the wall of a local temple and asked him to travel to Varanasi and sing for Her there. After several such visions of the Devi, Ramprasad began glowing with an aura, that was noticeable by many. Ramprasad died at the age of 80 while celebrating the Kālī Puja in the waters of Ganga.

Ramprasad's financial worries were now over, and he returned to his native village. There, he would spend hours singing beautiful bhajans in Bengali to the Devi, while standing in the waters of the Ganga. Many people started crowding the banks of the rivers to hear his beautiful chanting of his bhajans. One day, the Raja of Krishnanagar was travelling on his boat when he heard Ramprasad singing his bhajans. The Raja was mesmerized and requested Ramprasad to become a friend. Despite Ramprasad's protests, he donated a large plot of land to the saint's family. Ramprasad was also asked to be at the Raja's bedside and sing bhajans when the Raja passed away.

In his later years, Ramprasad became even more



20. Modern Hindu Reformer Saints

20.0 Who is a Social Reformer?

Hindu Dharma is the oldest religious and spiritual tradition in the world. There is no known human founder of our Dharma. It was already a very ancient religion when Buddha lived, more than 2500 years ago. We Hindus believe that Hindu Dharma is eternal, even though it has changed with time.

Like a river that starts from a pure and clean glacier, but collects all kinds of garbage and impure material on its way, the Hindu society too came to accumulate some evil customs with time. Our scriptures, Rishis and Sants have, from time to time, opposed these evil customs because they are against the teachings of our Dharma. Because of their guidance, we Hindus have been able to uproot many of these evil customs and therefore live a better life today. Such great persons who fight against evil customs in the society from time to time are called 'reformers.'

We Hindus are blessed that from time to time these social reformers have cleaned our society of evils. A few of them are listed below. Not all societies are lucky to have reformers. And therefore, there are social problems even today in many different parts of the world. Can you mention some social evils that exist in your own country?

Evil Customs in Hindu Communities

By the year 1700 CE, the following evil customs had appeared in some Hindu communities of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka:

1. **Sati:** In some Hindu communities, it was believed that when a man dies, his wife should cremate herself on his funeral pyre. Very few women actually did so, less than 1 in 1000. And most of these women truly believed that they were following Dharma by doing so, and did it out of their own free will. They were not forced to become Satis. Women became Satis because they believed that they and their husbands could reach heaven by her sacrifice. However, most Hindu scholars and Sants believed that no one has the right to destroy our body, which is a gift from Bhagavān. Finally, the British government put an end to this practice in the year 1828 CE. But much before that, reformers like Swami Sahajānanda in Gujarat, and the Peshwā rulers of India had opposed this practice.
2. **Discrimination against Lower Castes:** Hindu scriptures teach us that for the society to prosper, different people should specialize in different things – like teaching, farming, trade, military skills, art and so on. Everyone cannot specialize in everything, and therefore we should try to pick the skills we are good at, specialize in them and practice them so that we can serve the society. Unfortunately, with time, these skills became hereditary in the Hindu society. For example, only a priest's son could become a priest. Only a farmer's son could become a farmer and so on. But much worse, people began to discriminate against each other because of their hereditary profession. For example, people who followed professions like construction came to be looked down upon. These unfortunate people were often prevented from entering Hindu temples, and even from reading our scriptures by others. Many Hindu reformers fought for the rights of these low caste people and pointed out that our scriptures allow everyone to read them, and enter our Mandirs. Today, discrimination against them is banned by law in India and in Nepal – the two Hindu majority countries in the world.
3. **Women illiteracy:** In the Vedas, we read of many Rishikas, or women Rishis, who received sacred verses from Bhagavān. Many women were great scholars of the Vedas, of knowledge about Bhagavān, of Sanskrit grammar and so on. Unfortunately, with time, some people started believing that women should focus only on household tasks like cooking. They said that women do not need to, and must not study the Hindu scriptures, and that they cannot become Hindu priests. Despite all this, numerous Hindu women became saints in our history and we honor them to this day. Many reformers like Swami Dayanand Saraswati argued that women have equal rights with men to study the Vedas. He and his followers started schools for women, and some of them exist even to this day. Many narrow minded Hindus tried to oppose these reformers, but Swami Dayanand proved from the Vedas that women can study them because Bhagavān Himself gave portions of the Vedas to Rishikas.
4. **The Sad lives of Widows:** In ancient times, Hindu widows could remarry. But later on, Hindus believed that widows are not allowed to marry after their husband died. In contrast, there was no restriction on men, who could remarry when their wives died. This led to many tragic instances where a very young woman lost her husband, and then had to spend her entire life in loneliness, and at the mercy of her husband's relatives. Hindu social reformers like

Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyāsāgar and Maharshi Karve argued that Hindu scriptures like the Vedas clearly allow widows to marry and therefore it is unfair to expect them to lead sad and lonely lives. In fact, Maharshi Karve himself married a widow to practice what he taught to others.

5. **Female Infanticide:** Some Hindus thought that a son is more valuable than having a daughter. In very few communities, parents even went to the extent of killing their infant daughters because they wanted only sons. It should be noted however that female infanticide is not just a problem in India, and not just a social evil in the Hindu society. Many non-Hindus too practice it. Very unfortunately, other countries like Pakistan and China (where very few Hindus live) too have a lower proportion of girls to boys than expected because of this practice. Killing of infants is plain murder and laws have been passed in India against this social evil. Hindu reformers called this practice murder and said that Bhagavān will never forgive parents who practiced it.

6. **Superstitions:** Many illiterate Hindus wasted a lot of time and resources in following superstitions instead of improving their lives by following the genuine teachings of our Dharma and science. For example, instead of approaching a trained medical doctor for curing illness, some Hindus still prefer to go to untrained people claiming to have magical powers for curing diseases. Reformers like Swami Dayanand Saraswati pointed out that we Hindus have a very ancient and scientific tradition of medicine (that we studied earlier in this book), and should therefore respect and follow scientific methods instead of getting fooled by these untrained people.

7. **Looking down upon Physical Work:** Some Hindus think that doing physical work is not as great as doing work on paper or on a computer. Even when we see heaps of garbage lying all around us, we do not make an attempt to clean it, thinking that it is insulting to do this type of work. Bhagavān Krishna taught us that no work is unclean, or lowly for us to do. We must each do our duty. The same message was repeated by many of our saints and reformers as some of the stories below will show.

Most of these social evils have disappeared, or are disappearing rapidly from our Hindu society. But we all must do more work to get rid of them completely. We must spread the good teachings of Hindu Dharma so that everyone can be happy and is treated with fairness and justice. Will you also become a social reformer? Which evils in your country do you think you would like to fight?

20.1 Swami Sahajānanda (Swami Nārāyaṇa): 1781 – 1830 CE

Swami Sahajānanda Fights the Evil Customs of Female Infanticide and Sati

Swami Sahajananda staunchly opposed the practice of female infanticide that was practiced by some communities in Gujarat. The custom was called ‘dūdh piti’ (drowned in milk). A considerable expense was involved in the marriage of girls, due to which several families killed their own new born daughters by drowning them in a pitcher of milk.

Swami Sahajananda preached that killing of innocent daughters involved a three-fold sin. First, it was the murder of an innocent family member. Second, it was the murder of a child. And third, it was the murder of a helpless woman.



But, the communities objected to Swami Sahajānanda’s criticism of the custom and explained to him the difficulties in incurring the wedding expenses and so on. Swami Sahajānanda retorted, “This does not mean that you kill your own daughters. If you do not have enough money for marrying off your girls, the community can get together and collect the required amount.” But the members of these communities further argued, “There are very few good grooms available. Why should we marry our daughters to boys who have bad habits?” Swami Sahajānanda rejected all these arguments and said, “My community of followers will take care to marry off your daughters to good

men.”

He also rallied against the practice of Sati and forbade any man to instigate a widow to commit suicide. He preached that the human body was an invaluable gift from God and should be used for working our way towards Moksha. Howsoever virtuous her late husband may have been, the widow should not commit Sati. And anyone who encourages or forces a woman to commit Sati is a murderer of women.

Swami Sahajānanda risked making enemies of powerful communities of people in his area. But he truly believed that female infanticide and Sati were evil customs. Therefore, he was willing to stick out his neck to oppose them without any fear. But not only did he show bravery, he also demonstrated a lot of practical wisdom in making arrangements so that people could actually follow his ideals. This story shows that a good leader is not only brave, but also very practical minded and makes it easy for people to follow his ideals.

Swami Sahajānanda also fought other evil customs in western India like addiction to alcohol and reformed



many criminals who then became very virtuous people. He taught the message of Hindu Dharma to members of all Hindu communities, and even many Muslims became his students. His followers declared that Swami Sahajānanda was none other than Bhagavān Vishnu. He came to be called as ‘Swami Nārāyaṇa.’

His followers have today constructed massive and beautiful temples all over the world. The picture on the left shows their temple close to London in England.

Story: Who has truly lost his mind?

One day, Sahajānand Swami was walking through a market-place with one of his disciples. He noticed a man behaving in a funny manner. He was weighing dung, dust and stones in weighing pans saying, “Here is sugar. Here is the salt.” The Swami asked his disciple, “Why is he behaving in this manner?” The disciple replied, “Gurudev, this man lost all his money due to a great loss in his business. He could not bear the loss and lost his mind.” Sahajānand Swami replied, “In my opinion, he alone has lost his mind who does not worship Bhagavān, because He is our greatest treasure.”

Story: Sahajānand Swami cuts his shikhā (top-knot of hair) for a child

One day, Sahajānand Swami went for a shave and a haircut. As he was regarded as a saint, people often collected his hair for worship. According to the custom of the day, the barber never cut his tuft of hair at the crown of the skull. This tuft of hair is called the shikhā and is considered sacred. Brahmanas in that day and often even today do not cut this tuft of hair. A little boy came to the barber and requested, “Could you keep Gurudev’s hair for me? I will come to collect them after the haircut is over.” The barber agreed, but forgot to do so. When the boy returned later and found that the hair had been disposed of, he was very sad and began to cry. When Sahajānand Swami learned of this, he went to the boy and asked him to cut off his shikhā. But the boy refused and said, “I cannot do that Gurudev. Cutting someone’s shikhā is a great sin.” Sahajānand Swami smiled and said, “I do not want you to feel sad anymore. I will give it to you myself.” Then, he took a pair of scissors and cut his own shikhā and gave it to the boy. The boy was thrilled to receive it and thanked Sahajānand Swami for his kindness.

Story: The Value of Sevā (helping others through physical service and other means): Sahajānand Swami used to say that he could never have too much of the following four things: Reading scriptures, conversations

about Bhagavān, chanting the praises of Bhagavān, and Sevā. True to his teachings, Sahajānand Swami demonstrated the value of Sevā (helping others) in his daily life.

Once, he asked a student of his named Nārāyaṇa Bhatta, who was a farmer, to come with him to a different town to celebrate a festival. The disciple said that he was unable to do so because it was harvesting season. If he did not harvest his crop before leaving with his Guru, the crop would go bad by the time he returned home. Swami



Sahajānand asked, “Will you come with us to celebrate the festival if I and all the rest of us help you in harvesting the crop? If all of us help you, the work will get done faster and then join us.” The disciple agreed. Swami Sahajānand arranged for some sickles and joined his other disciples to harvest the crop. With their help, the work was completed very fast, and Nārāyaṇa Bhatta was able to join his Guru for celebrating the festival.

In the year 1813 – 1814, a great famine hit the peninsula of Saurāshtra in western India. Sahajānand Swami was pained to see that thousands were dying due to hunger and thirst. He swung into action and asked his followers to ship grains from other parts of western India to feed the hungry and starving. He instructed that food should be distributed to everyone, no matter what religion or community they belong to. The tradition of providing help to

people stuck by natural calamities (e.g. the earthquake in Kutch in 2001) has been carried on by his followers to this day.

One day, Sahajānand Swami’s disciple Zinabhai went to enquire about the health of Kamalshi, a poor and elderly weaver. Zinabhai was very pained to see that Kamalshi was very ill, and dying because his son and daughter-in-law did not want to take care of their old father. Zinabhai said to Kamalshi’s son, “If you do not want to take care of your father, do you mind if I take him to my home and look after him?” The son had no objection, and therefore Zinabhai prepared to lift Kamalshi as he lay in his cot. He found three men to help him. Together, the four men lifted the cot and walked outside with Kamalshi laying on it.



Now, Zinabhai was a very well-known and a wealthy landowner of that area. He had come on horseback to visit Kamalshi. As he walked carrying one corner of the cot, with his horse following him, some other people came forward to help and relieved Zinabhai. When Zinabhai reached home, he asked his sister, “Which room shall we give to Kamalshi for his recovery?” She replied, “He is just a poor man. It will be fine for him to stay in the first room you walk into when you enter our mansion.” But Zinabhai thought, “Kamalshi will get disturbed and will have no privacy if people keep passing him. Let me take him into my own bedroom.” Zinabhai took the sick old man into his own bedroom, and cared for

Kamalshi as long as he lived, even performing menial tasks like cleaning his stool. When Sahajānand Swami heard of his disciple's kindness, he visited Zinabhai several times, and embraced him out of affection.

Many years later, Zinabhai passed away when Sahajānand Swami happened to be in that area. When his dead body was being taken for cremation, Sahajānand Swami stepped forward and helped in carrying the bier on which the corpse was placed. A disciple asked, "Gurudev, you had not carried your own nephew's bier when he died. What was so special about Zinabhai who is merely your disciple?" Sahajānand Swami replied, "Zinabhai had helped carry Kamalshi to take him to his home even though Kamalshi was just a poor weaver. Therefore, I will carry Zinabhai's body at least twice that distance that Zinabhai had carried Kamalshi out of respect for him."

Sahajānand Swami got several Mandirs constructed so that his followers and other Hindus could worship. One day, while a mandir was under construction, the mason shouted, "I need the pot of mortar to cement the stones. Can anyone bring it to me?" There was no one around. Sahajānand Swami heard the mason and started carrying the heavy pot containing the mortar to the laborer. One of his disciples Swami Nityānanda rushed forward and requested, "Gurudev, please do not lift this heavy pot. I can get a laborer to carry it to the mason." Sahajānand Swami smiled and said, "By carrying this pot, I am doing Bhagavān's work. We must serve Bhagavān through our body too, by doing physical labor." Sahajānand Swami showed his respect and love for his disciples who were poor laborers by hugging them with affection when he met them, not bothering that they were dirty at that time and could spoil his own clothing through contact.

Things to do

Explore: Visit the websites of some important temples constructed by the followers of Swami Nārāyaṇa like <http://www.akshardham.com/whatisakdm/index.htm> Visit a Swami Nārāyaṇa Mandir if there is one close to you.

Discuss: Hindu Dharma teaches us that little girls are like Devi Durgā. Therefore, killing one's daughter is like killing Devi Durgā. And loving and respecting one's daughter is like loving, respecting and worshipping Devi Durgā. Do you agree to this or not?

20.2 Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyāsāgar (1820 – 1891 CE)

Born in eastern India in Bengal, he was a great Hindu scholar and reformer, who led a movement to support the remarriage of widows. As a result of his efforts, the East India Company passed '*The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act XV*' in 1856, legalizing the re-marriage of widows in their territories. Vidyāsāgar quoted from Hindu scriptures like the Parāshara Smṛiti which sanctioned widow remarriage, and emphasized the importance of these scriptures in modern times.

Story: The Value of Hard Work

One day Ishwarachandra Vidyāsāgar was walking down a street. A beggar boy approached him and said, "Please give me 1 paisa⁴⁶ so that I can buy food and fill my stomach."

Vidyāsagar asked, "What if I give you 2 paise?" The boy said, "Then I will buy food for my mother."

Vidyāsagar asked, "What if I give you 1 Rupee (= 64 paise in that time)?" The boy replied, "I will use the money to buy goods and then sell them at a higher price elsewhere. With my profit, I will be able to feed myself and my mother the fruit of my hard work honorably."

Ishwarachandra Vidyāsāgar was very pleased to hear the reply of the self-respecting boy, and gave him 1 Rupee as donation.

After several years, Vidyāsāgar passed by that area once again and saw that a new shop had come up in that area. The owner, a young boy, stepped out and fell at the feet of the great scholar. The boy said, "You might not remember me.

⁴⁶ Indian currency is 1 Rupee = 100 paise

But your donation of Re 1 that day enabled me to start my own business. If is due to your help that I can now earn my bread honorably and do not have to beg others for it.”

Story: The Humility of Vidyāsāgar



Ishwarchandra Vidyāsāgar was a great scholar of Hindu Dharma and a social reformer in the 19th century Bengal. Numerous anecdotes are narrated from his life illustrating his qualities of truth and honesty.

Once, he was offered a job by the British rulers at the prestigious Sanskrit College in Calcutta. Vidyāsāgar knew that Taranath Vachaspati, a renowned Sanskrit scholar had also applied to the position. Therefore, he insisted that the position be offered to Vachaspati in lieu of him, even though Vidyāsāgar himself needed the money offered by the job. Vidyasagar argued that Vachaspati was a better scholar than he, and therefore deserved the position more than he did.

However, the British secretary, Mr. Marshall, responded that there was no time to contact Vachaspati. Undaunted, Vidyāsāgar offered to contact Vachaspati himself. He walked all day and night till he reached Vachaspati’s village, and notified the scholar of his new appointment at the Sanskrit college.

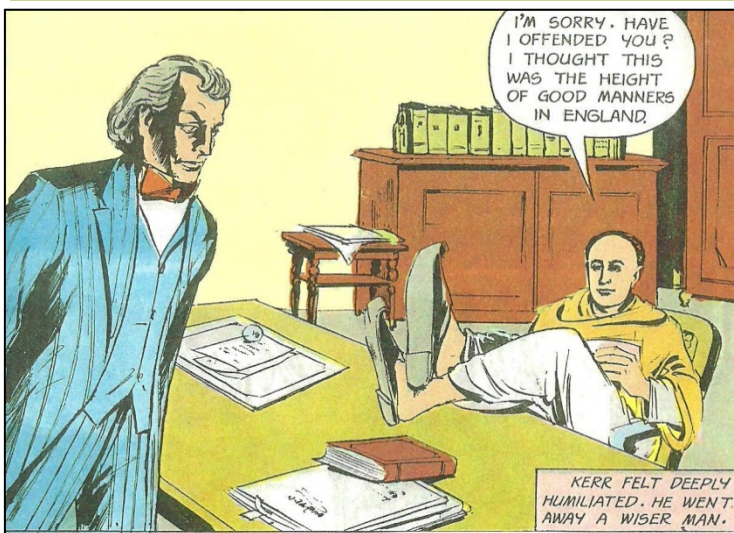
Story: Vidyāsāgar teaches his visitor the Dignity of Labor

The fame of Ishwarachandra Vidyāsāgar, a Sanskrit scholar and a Hindu social reformer, spread far and wide. Despite his fame, Vidyāsāgar continued to live a simple life and wear traditional Indian clothing.

Once, he was invited to deliver a lecture at a village in Bengal. When Vidyāsāgar alighted from the train at the railway station, he did not find anyone who had come to receive him. Another gentleman, dressed in western clothing, got off the train and he thought that Vidyāsāgar was a coolie. Addressing him rudely, the young man asked him to pick up his luggage and take it to the destination where a famous scholar ‘Vidyāsāgar’ was scheduled to give a talk. Vidyāsāgar quietly picked his bags and took him to the venue.

Later, when the young man saw that it was none other than Vidyāsāgar whom he had thought of as a coolie, he was shocked and fell at Vidyāsāgar’s feet asking for forgiveness. But Vidyāsāgar smiled and said, “I just wanted to teach you that there is nothing degrading in picking one’s own luggage. We must not feel ashamed doing our own work!”

Story: Self Respect:



Being humble does not mean that we keep taking insults from racists and other arrogant people. The story below shows how Pandit Ishwarachandra Vidyāsāgar taught a lesson to his racist colleague.

One day, Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar went to see Mr. Kerr, the British origin Principal of the Hindu College. The racist and arrogant Mr. Kerr did not offer Vidyasagar a chair to sit, and placed his feet on his table when Vidyasagar arrived to speak to him.

Vidyasagar merely entered his office without showing any sign of feeling insulted, and said what he had to say. Thereafter, he left quietly.

A few days later, when Vidyasagar learned that Kerr is coming to see him in his own office, he quickly had all spare chairs in the office removed. When Kerr entered Vidyasagar’s office, he saw the latter sitting on the solitary

chair, with his feet on the desk! Kerr was deeply offended, and said that a 'native' should show more respect to a British man.

But Vidyasagar merely smiled and replied, "I thought that I was only following the good manners and etiquette from Europe." Kerr was humiliated and did not treat Vidyasagar rudely again.

Story: Do not waste anything

One day, Khudiram Bose visited Ishvarachandra Vidyasagar at the latter's home. The two started chewing some juicy china orange fruit. Khudiram spat out the chewed fruit from his mouth into his hand and got up to throw them away. Ishvarachandra immediately stopped him, "Do not waste food."

Khudiram was surprised and asked, "Well, of what use are these chewed pieces of fruit?" Ishvarachandra asked him to place the chewed fruit outside the window of his home. Soon, some crows swooped down and took the chewed fruit in their beaks to eat it as their food.

Ishvarachandra smiled and said, "As long as an item can be used by some creature, do not throw it away. Nothing should be discarded till it becomes a totally useless to all creatures."

20.3 Arumuga Navalar (1822 – 1879 CE):



When Arumuga was born, it was a difficult time for the Hindus of Sri Lanka, where they formed a majority of the population in northern parts like Jaffna Peninsula. Almost two centuries earlier, the Portuguese invaders had killed the Hindu ruler of Jaffna, and had forcibly converted his three sons to Christianity. Thereafter, the British invaders too started discriminating against the Hindus.

Many temples were demolished, Hindu beliefs were ridiculed and many Hindus were forcibly converted to Christianity. Arumuga was a great scholar of Hindu scriptures called Āgamas, in which Shiva was worshipped as the Supreme Lord. He was pained to see the pitiable state of the Hindu society around him. He realized that the common Hindu could not understand his own religion clearly because the scriptures were either not available easily, or they were in Sanskrit which people did not understand.



Hindu religious ceremonies too were very costly and complicated. The society was suffering from many evils like addiction to alcohol. Christian missionaries were distributing Bibles at low costs and publicly criticizing Hindu customs. Due to all these reasons, many Hindus were converting to Christianity.

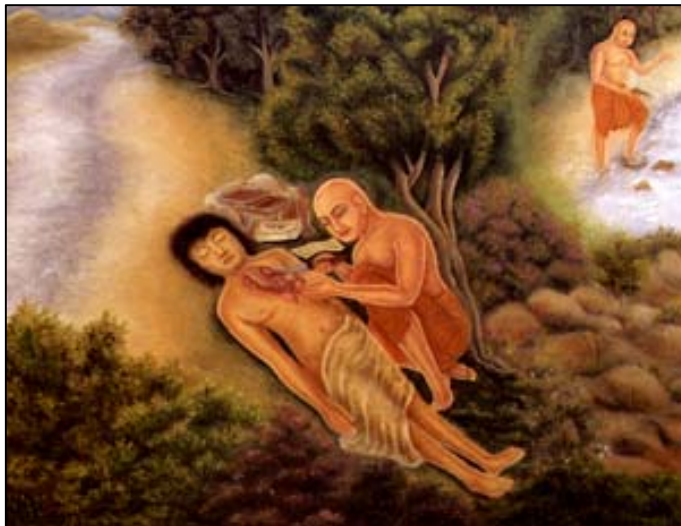
Therefore, he decided to use modern methods to spread the teachings of Shaivite Hindu Dharma. He used the recently popularized printing presses to publish Hindu scriptures and explanations of them in the local Tamil language. He also published criticisms of Christianity, and wrote criticisms of Christian missionary attacks on Hindu Dharma. Arumuga also opposed the social evils and the costly ceremonies that some priests asked Hindus to carry out by pointing out that they were not described in the Shaiva Āgama scriptures. Due to his efforts, the Hindus of Sri Lanka came to be more educated in our Dharma, and conversions to Christianity largely stopped.

Arumuga was very dedicated to the service of his Dharma. He decided to remain unmarried, and also did not claim any money from his father's inheritance. He lived on donations received from his followers, and set an example for others on how to live like a good Hindu. Many Hindu priests who felt threatened by Arumuga's activities boycotted him and criticized him. But Arumuga Navalar stood firm on his beliefs, and united the Hindus of Sri Lanka without getting bothered by these criticisms. He started many schools similar to Christian missionaries to teach Hindu Dharma and modern subjects to Hindu students. Many of these schools survive even today.

Thanks to his efforts, Sri Lankan Hindus were able to preserve our traditions and Dharma against the attacks of British Christian missionaries. Hindu Dharma remains, to this day, the faith of majority of the people living in some northern and eastern parts of the island country of Sri Lanka.

20.4 Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati (1824 – 1883):

Regarded as one of the greatest social reformer of the Hindu society, he was born close to the modern town of Morvi in the Indian state of Gujarat. As a child, he was very inquisitive about the nature of this world and Bhagavān but was not very satisfied with the answers that his parents and others gave to him. Around the age of 20, he ran



away from his home and became a Sādhu. He roamed throughout central and northern India and studied under many different Gurus. He became a scholar of many Hindu scriptures, but found that some of the teachings of the later books were wrong, because they were written by authors who had incomplete knowledge and understanding.

Hindu Dharma teaches us to accept something only if it makes sense to us, and if it seems correct. A Sanskrit proverb says, "Do not accept a false statement even if it has been said by Brahṁā." Shankarāchārya (7th-8th cent. C.E.), one of the greatest Hindu philosophers, had also said that even if hundreds of verses in the Vedas were to say that 'fire is cold', then we cannot accept it because by our own experience, fire is hot and burns us!

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna teaches the entire philosophy of Hindu Dharma to Arjuna. But at the end, He does not say, "It is My command that you must follow whatever I have said." Instead, Krishna asked him whether his delusion of ignorance was destroyed by His answers to Arjuna's questions. Respecting one's Guru and holy books does not mean that we accept whatever they say. No one knows everything, including your teacher. Therefore, if you have a doubt, ask your teacher. And if your questions are not answered satisfactorily, then do your own investigation. The story below shows how Swami Dayanand found out the truth himself.

Story: Swami Dayanand Saraswati Dissects a Corpse

Swami Dayanand read elaborate descriptions of human anatomy (the structure of organs, bones inside the body) through some newer books of Hathayoga (a branch of Yoga that focusses on breathing and physical exercises) like the Hathayogapradipika. However, the complicated descriptions of these books had really confused him. One day, as he was walking on the banks of the Ganga river in the town of Garhmukteshwar, he saw a corpse floating by.

Swami Dayanand dragged the corpse out of the water. With a knife, he cut the abdomen to examine the heart. He also examined some areas in the neck and the head, and tried to compare them with the anatomical descriptions given in the works of Hathayoga. After sometime, the Swami concluded that the descriptions in these books did not match the actual structure of the human body.

Therefore, Swami Dayanand concluded that these books were inaccurate and not reliable. Disappointed, he threw back these books and the corpse into the river. He came to the conclusion that only the Vedas and ancient works of Rishis like Patanjali and Kapila were true and accurate.

Story: How Swami Dayanand Saraswati paid his Guru Dakshina

Around the year 1851, Swami Dayanand Saraswati was on a search of a Guru who could teach him the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar. He carried with him manuscripts of the grammar book *Sārasvata Kaumudi* and other books which were very expensive and rare in those days. One day, he heard that the blind man Swami Virjananda of Mathura was a great scholar of Sanskrit grammar. So one night, he knocked at the door of Swami Virjananda, who asked Swami Dayanand what books he had studied and what books he was carrying.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati responded, “I have studied the grammar in *Sārasvata Kaumudi* and some other books, and I am carrying their manuscripts. But I have still not been able to master the grammar of Sanskrit.” Swami Virjananda replied, “Then these books are of no use. Go and throw your manuscripts in the waters of the Yamuna river.” With batting an eyelid, Swami Dayanand Saraswati went to the Yamuna river and threw away his manuscripts.

When he returned to Swami Virjananda, the latter said, “All books of grammar created by small minds in recent times are of little use. Instead, you should study grammar from the works of Panini and Patanjali written several thousand years ago. Only the works of great Rishis and Munis like them can help you master the subject of Sanskrit grammar.”



Virajananda was a very quick tempered and a harsh person. He used to be the teacher of Princes in a Rajput kingdom in western India and was very meticulous about punctuality. One day, the Princes arrived a bit late. Swami Virajananda immediately packed up his bags and left the kingdom to move to Mathura, another city in N India, because he had zero tolerance for his students arriving late.

The Guru would get annoyed at little things and even hit his grown up students. One day, Swami Dayanand swept the floor of his Guru's room and heaped the garbage in a corner to pick it up soon. Suddenly, the Guru arrived and stepped on the heap of garbage. He flew into a rage and beat Dayananda with a stick. But despite his Guru's harsh behavior, Dayananda did not get upset. Instead, he

started massaging the hands of his Guru saying, ‘Gurudev, I am young and my body is very sturdy but your arms are weak. I apologize if I have caused a pain to your arms.’ Swami Dayananda knew that his Guru was very knowledgeable and kind hearted, and therefore he did not get upset by the harshness of his behavior.

Swami Dayanand then spent a few years studying grammar under Swami Virjananda with the help of books of the Rishis, and mastered the subject. When it was time to depart from his Guru, he offered some cloves to Swami Virjananda (thinking that they will soothe the pain due to his stomach ulcers) as a parting gift. But Swami Virjananda said, “There was no need to give me a gift. But I need a promise from you – that you will devote your life to teach and popularize the works of great Rishis, and that you will spread the message of the Vedas to the common people even if you have to lose your life in this effort. You will never compromise with evil, and will not hesitate to criticize the superstitions in our society.”

Swami Dayanand agreed and spent the remaining years of his life spreading the message of the Vedas and popularizing other works of Rishis all over north India. Several attempts were made on his life by evil people, but he never stepped back and always forgave those who had tried to kill him, and never went back on the promise that he had given to his Guru.

Story: Swami Dayanand Saraswati acknowledges the Respect of a Poor Man

In the town of Anupshahar in Uttar Pradesh, India, a humble barber became a great admirer of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. One day, the barber lovingly served a few rotis to the Swami, and said, in a trembling voice, "Swamiji, everyone considers me a low born, humble barber. I apologize for offering you this roti, even though I am an unclean person." There were about twenty Brahmanas sitting in the vicinity and they too remarked, "How can you eat a roti given by an unclean and low person like a barber?"

Swamiji smiled and said, "There is nothing unclean about this roti. It is made of wheat, just as a roti from any other person. Only that food is unclean which is purchased with ill-gotten money, or which has contaminating stuff in it. I will definitely eat the roti offered by you."



This story shows how the humble and kind gesture of Swami Dayanand acknowledged that the Swami had respect for everyone in his heart, even for people who were regarded as lowly by the rest of the society.

Story: The Effect of Bhajans – How Swami Dayanand reformed Amichandra

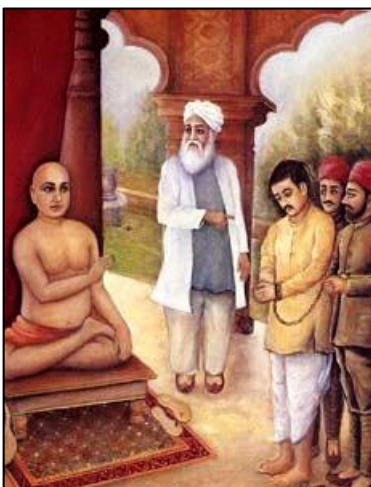
Swami Dayanand Saraswati had a disciple named Amichandra, who sang very well and also played the Tabla. The Swami entrusted him with the task of singing bhajans in his sermons.



Some other disciples of the Swami objected and said, "Gurudev, Amichandra is an alcoholic. Therefore, if we associate with him, our own reputation will be harmed."

But Swami Dayanand replied, "Till now, Amichandra sang only for pleasure or for money. Today, he has started singing for the Divine. We should encourage him because in this way, he will eventually give up his alcoholism and other bad habits."

In fact, this is what happened. Singing spiritual and religious songs at meetings, Amichandra himself got reformed and gave up his bad habits. He became an active supporter of Swami Dayanand in his efforts to reform the Hindu society.



Story: Swami Dayanand forgives his assailant

The Swami was fearless in criticizing priests who fooled the innocent common people in the name of religion. One day, a Pandit offered him a paan which had poison inside it. When Swami Dayanand fell ill after eating it, he used his Yogic training to spit out the poison and survived the attempt to murder him.

The news reached the Muslim Police officer of the Anupshahr, where Swami Dayanand was staying at that time. The officer was a great admirer of the Swami. He got the Pandit arrested and produced him in front of Swami Dayanand. He asked, "What punishment do you think we should give to him?"

To his surprise, Swami Dayanand replied, “I have come to free people, not to imprison them. Therefore, please free this man.” The Police Officer was astonished at how forgiving Swami Dayanand was.

Story: Swami Dayanand teaches good habits to a Student

The Swami once visited a rich man in the city of Bombay (today called Mumbai). He noticed that the ten year old boy of the host was very spoilt. He called the boy and said to him lovingly, “Child, please pay attention to some good things that I will teach you. Wake up early in the morning. Wash up and then bow to your parents. And make sure that you carry your own books to the school. Do not ask a servant to carry your stuff.”



Swami Dayanand fought for the rights of women and proved from the Vedas that all human beings have the right to study Hindu scriptures. Till his times, Muslims and Christians converted Hindus to their religions, but Hindus did not convert others to Hindu Dharma. Hindus believed that one had to be born a Hindu to be a Hindu and that conversion to Hinduism was not possible. But Swami Dayanand Saraswati disagreed. He and his followers started the ‘Shuddhi Movement’ under which several hundred thousand Christians and Muslims were converted to Hindu Dharma.

Most Hindus were not able to read the Vedas because they were in a language that the common man could not understand. Therefore, Swami Dayanand started translating them into Hindi for the first time in history. Unfortunately, he died before completing his translations, but his followers continued his task. Thanks to his pioneering efforts, the Vedas are today available in translations in many languages of India. Due to his great scholarship of the Vedas and his saintly character, Swami Dayanand came to be known as ‘Maharshi’, which means ‘Great Rishi.’ He founded an organization called Arya Samaj in 1875, which continues to have millions of followers to this day.

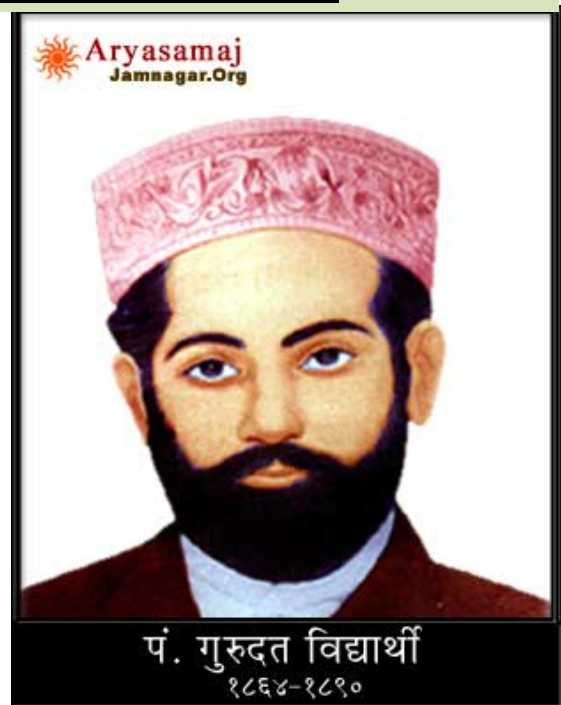
Story: Pandit Gurudutt shows the correct way of learning from the lives of Saints

Pandit Gurudutt (1864 – 1890 CE) was a close associate and confidante of the Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824 – 1883 CE). After the Swami passed away, some followers urged Gurudutt, “You knew the Swami very well. Why not write a biography of him? It will bring you great fame.”

Pandit Gurudutt replied, “Yes, I am actually writing a biography of Swami Dayanand. I have started working on it.”

One of Swami’s followers asked, “Well, that is wonderful. We shall await its completion. Do you know when you will complete the biography?”

Pandit Gurudutt replied, “Let me clarify one thing right now. I am not writing a biography using pen and paper. Instead, I believe that the best way of writing a great man’s biography is to follow his teachings and life, and live like he did. I have started emulating his examples, his teachings and his actions. Let us see how long it will take me to become like him.”



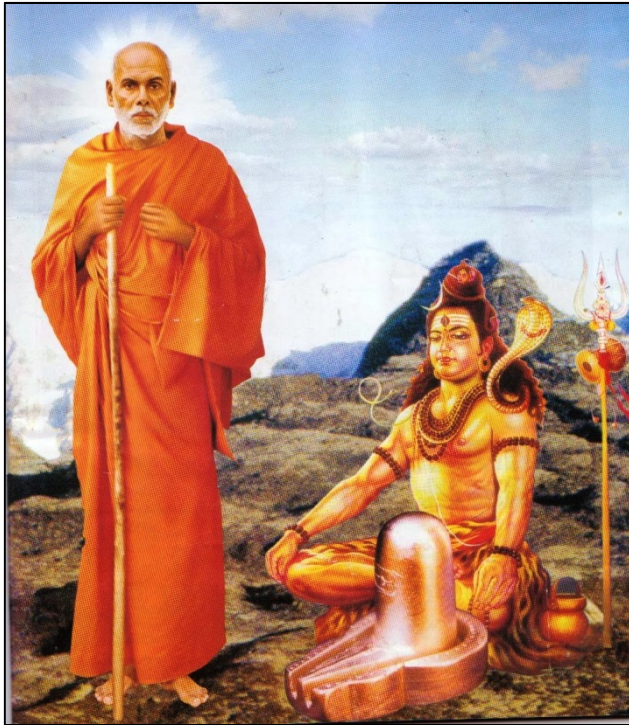
20.5 Shri Nārāyaṇa Guru

Shri Narayana Guru was a great social reformer who lived from 1854-1928 in the Indian state of Kerala. He championed the rights of the poor and downtrodden sections of the Hindu society, and taught that Bhagavān lives equally within everyone. Within his life time, he attracted thousands of followers in S India and Sri Lanka, and admirers like Mahatma Gandhi. From his childhood itself, he showed signs of being a saint.

Shri Nārāyaṇa Guru was born on 20th August 1854 in a family of farmers close to the city of Trivandrum in the Indian state of Kerala. His father was a scholar of Sanskrit scriptures and taught his son (whom he called 'Nanu') well. Right from his childhood, Nanu showed signs of greatness.

When Nanu was 15 years old, his mother passed away. Nanu now left his home to study the Vedas and the Upanishads, which are the holiest of Hindu scriptures, under the guidance of Hindu scholars a few miles away from his home. Soon, Nanu too became famous as a Sanskrit scholar. After 13 years, he completed his education. Nanu married, but his wife died soon and they had no children. After the death of his wife and father, Nanu became a wandering Sadhu.

In his travels from one place to another, he met with numerous Hindu Sants like Chettambi Swami (another social reformer) and a Yoga teacher named Ayyavu. After some travels, Nanu settled down at Aruvipuram, a forested place with a beautiful stream. There, he set up a Shiva Mandir so that the locals could worship.



In those days, only Brahmanas could consecrate (i.e., perform the religious ceremonies to bring Divine energy) a mūrti. When they objected that Nanu was from a low caste called Ezhava and therefore he could not consecrate the Shivalinga, Nanu replied, “Well, in that case you need not come and worship here. This is an Ezhava Shivalinga.”

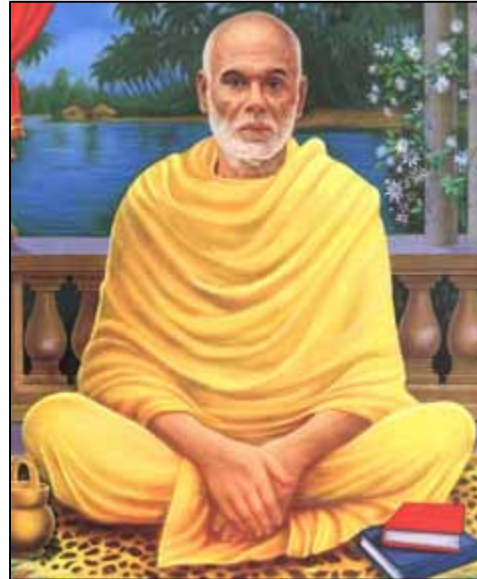
Nārāyaṇa Guru also advocated compassion towards animals. He taught that we should be vegetarians, and that we must not slaughter animals in temples, as was a custom in some temples of Kerala. One day, while travelling on a bullock cart, he noticed that the cart driver was whipping the bullock harshly. Nārāyaṇa Guru got so disturbed that he got off the cart and walked the remaining journey of twenty miles on foot. Another time, he refused to drink milk when he learned that the milkman had not left any milk for the calf born to the mother cow that had given the milk.

Nārāyaṇa Guru taught the poor not to pity themselves or feel weak. He emphasized that we should all work hard, educate ourselves and improve our own condition instead of being dependent on others. He opened numerous temples where the consecration of mūrtis was done in a very simple way but with a lot of devotion. This is because Nanu felt that our love and devotion for Bhagavān is more important than having priests perform long ceremonies and rituals. He also started numerous schools to educate the Ezhava and Harijan communities of Kerala, and also taught them the scriptures of Hindu Dharma so that they are no longer dependent on Brahmanas.

His fame spread far and wide. He was invited to lecture in other countries like Sri Lanka, and renowned leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and the nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore came to visit him. Nārāyaṇa Guru also encouraged his followers to participate in a protest movement called the Vykam Satyāgraha during the years 1924-

1925, in which the protestors fought for the right of Harijans to walk on temple streets and enter Hindu Mandirs. Mahatma Gandhi too supported this movement. Nārāyaṇa Guru himself passed away in September 1928. Finally in the year 1937, the Maharaja of Travancore kingdom (in the southern half of Kerala) passed a law that all Hindus can enter Mandirs in his kingdom. The decision was welcomed by all, except by some old-fashioned Hindus and Christians.⁴⁷

The important message that we get from Shri Nārāyaṇa Guru's life is that all human beings are equal, and that Bhagavān resides in the hearts of everyone equally. We all have a right to worship, get educated and improve our condition. And most important, we must not be dependent on others for help. Instead, we should try to work hard and uplift ourselves with our own efforts. If others do not help us, we should just ignore them and continue with our good work, with full Shraddhā in Bhagavān. Because of his efforts, the Ezhavas (who are 20% of the population of Kerala) and many other Hindus were able to get educated and become prosperous.



Story: Shri Narayana Guru runs away from his home to save his family from disease:

When Narayan Guru was a small child (not even a teenager), he sensed that he was coming down with Small Pox. In those days, this disease was often fatal, and known to be very contagious. Fearing that he might infect others, Nanu (as the Saint was called in his childhood) stealthily left his house and went to a jungle. There, he found an abandoned Durga Mandir. Soon, Nanu developed high fever and small box boils all over the body. For eighteen days, as he suffered, Nanu kept praying to Ma Durga to take care of him. He survived on forest fruit and river water, but did not go back to his home. Finally, when the disease was over, Nanu walked back home.

His family members were overjoyed to see him back, when they had thought that he had disappeared and was dead. But they were also sad to see that their little child had suffered from small pox. An elder asked him, "Why did you not come back home when you were suffering so much with the disease? Here we would have taken care of you and you would have felt much more comfortable."

Nanu replied, "I was suffering from a very contagious disease. I did not want any one of you to catch it. Therefore, I decided to stay all alone in the forest till I got well."

Story: Shri Narayana Guru asks for equal treatment for everyone

In those days, the society of Kerala was very harsh towards some sections of the Hindu community that were called 'untouchables'. They were not allowed to enter temples, and had to keep a minimum distance from people of other castes on the roads. Swami Vivekananda was so disgusted with social evil which is not allowed by Hindu scriptures, that he referred to Kerala as a 'mad asylum.' Nārāyaṇa Guru (as Nanu had come to be known as) was totally opposed to discrimination against the 'untouchables' (who were later called 'Harijans' or children of Bhagavān by Mahatma Gandhi).

Shri Narayana Guru had founded a Shiva Mandir in Kerala. Gradually, an Ashrama developed around it. On Shivaratri every year, a grand festival began to be celebrated around that temple in the presence of Narayana Guru. One year, on the Shiva Ratri night, as speaker after speaker went on the stage to talk about the wonderful qualities of Narayana Guru, the Guru himself noticed that a small group in the audience was sitting apart from everyone else.

⁴⁷ Christian preachers used to ask Hindus who were discriminated against (e.g. by not being allowed to enter temples) to become Christians. Therefore, when the Maharaja passed the law allowing all Hindus to enter the Mandirs, the Christian preachers were not very happy because now they could not easily convert Hindus.

He realized that this small group of people was from the so called untouchable community who had been forced to sit apart by the rest of the crowd. Narayana Guru signaled the speaker to become quiet for some time. Then he called two untouchable kids from the group to come to him. As everyone looked at the Guru, he asked the two kids to sit on the stage by his side.

The Guru then taught, “Just like you and I, these kids and everyone in the group sitting apart are all children of Bhagavān. We must not discriminate against anyone due to his birth, caste or religion. The same Divine Light shines within all of us because Bhagavān lives in the heart of every creature.”

Shri Narayana Guru taught everyone that instead of complaining about one’s problems, we should help ourselves and improve our condition. He encouraged low-caste Hindus to start their own temples. In those days, animals were often sacrificed in temples in Kerala. Narayana Guru opposed this practice and asked Hindus to show compassion towards animals.

The Narayana Dharma Paripālana Sabhā, an organization created by his followers in his lifetime itself, is still very active today and guides the lives of a big portion of Hindus in Kerala.

Questions for Discussion

1. Just because the Hindu society had many social evils, does it mean that other societies are better than ours?
2. Some Hindus believe that by fighting evils in our society, social reformers actually insult our Dharma and bring shame to us. Do you agree or not? [Hint: Respond to this question after reading this chapter completely].
3. Some Hindus go to other parts of the world and advertise our social evils on front of non-Hindus. Do you think this is a wise thing to do? What is the difference between these Hindus and the true Social Reformers?

21. Modern Hindu Leaders

21.1 Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya:

He was one of the freedom fighters in the Indian freedom movement against the British Rule. He was born in a very poor, but a very religious Hindu family. His father and other teachers taught him Hindu scriptures like the Gita at a young age. Later, his mother borrowed money against her gold bangles so that he could attend an English school. An exceptionally good student that he was, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya studied to become a lawyer in his adult life. His life was a good example of how Hindu values can be practiced in our day to day lives.



One day, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya was walking on a street when he saw a poor beggar woman lying with a begging bowl beside her. No one was paying attention to her although she seemed ill and her bowl was virtually empty. Pandit Malviya was a well-known person in the city. He sat down next to her. Soon, people started stopping by and dropped coins in the bowl.

When the bowl was full, Pandit Malviya summoned a rickshaw. He seated her on the rickshaw and dropped her off at the hospital, so that she could be treated.

On another day, he saw a dog that had a cut behind its ear. The dog kept growling and running around as it was in great pain. Pandit Malviya went to a vet and described the dog's injury. The physician said, "I will give you a medicine that you can pour on a piece of cloth and apply at the dog's injury. But let me warn you. The dog is in great pain and has likely gone mad. If you try to apply medicine to him, it might bite you. My suggestion is that you just leave the dog alone and let him suffer."

But Pandit Malviya did not agree. He soaked a clean cloth in the medicine and then tied the cloth at the end of a long stick. Then, he approached the dog and cornered it at the dead end of a closed street. With the stick, he pressed the medicine soaked rag at the dog's injury a few times. Each time, the dog would growl and try to attack Pandit Malviya. But, he continued to apply the medicine. Eventually, after the medicine had been applied thoroughly, he left the dog alone. Under the effect of the medicine, the dog went to sleep. And when it woke up, the wound was much healed and the dog had no pain.

Many similar stories are narrated from Pandit Malviya's life illustrating how we can practice Dharmic virtues like compassion through little and simple acts in our daily lives.

Pandit Malviya felt that there must be a university that could teach Hindu values to students along with western sciences. He toured all over India, Myanmar, Pakistan and Bangladesh begging people for money for this noble cause. When his son was getting married, he learned that the bride's parents were planning to spend a great amount of money on the wedding celebrations. He went to his son's bride's home and asked her father to instead donate the money for the university. He also went to Hyderabad, which was ruled by the Muslim ruler Nizam, to ask for money. Unfortunately, the Nizam refused initially. One day, a funeral procession of a rich man was passing through the streets of Hyderabad. The dead man's relatives started throwing coins in the air for the beggars to collect and bless the dead person in return. Pandit Malviya too started collecting the coins for his University. When the Nizam heard this news, he felt embarrassed that Pandit Malviya had to collect money for his University in this way even though the Nizam was one of the richest person in the whole world at that time. He summoned Pandit Malviya, and then gave him a decent amount for the noble cause. Similarly, when his son was getting married, the latter's future father in law wanted to spend a large amount of money for the wedding. Pandit Malviya persuaded the father of the bride to cut down the wedding expenses greatly, and instead donate his money to charitable causes like the Hindu university. This instance from his life teaches us that we must not waste money on lavish weddings because the money can be used for better purposes like supporting education, or for benefiting the poor, orphans and other needy sections of our society.

Finally, the dream of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya came true on the day of Vasant Panchami in the year 1916, with the inauguration of the Benares Hindu University in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi. The University is even today one of the best colleges in India. The determination with which Pandit Malviya collected money to construct the University teaches us that when we work for a noble cause, we must put in our entire effort and never give up till the goal is reached.

21.2 Mahatma Gandhi

The life of Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948 CE) exemplifies numerous Hindu values and ideals in our modern times. Following are some of the incidents in his life that can teach a lot to us.

Story: Mahatma Gandhi responds to an Abusive Letter

Once, a critic of Mahatma Gandhi wrote him a very long letter. Mahatma Gandhi patiently read the letter carefully, going over page after page of abuse. He did not seem to get bothered at all by the nonsense written in that letter. After he completed reading it, he removed the paper clip holding the pages, and placed it inside his small box of stationary items for future use. Then he just crumpled the letter and threw the sheets in a recycle bin because they were of no use to him.

This story demonstrates the value of freedom from anger (akrodha).

Story- The Kindness of Mahatma Gandhi reforms a Thief:

“One night a thief entered the ashram of Mahatma Gandhi. Someone woke up with the sound and saw the thief. He woke up other people in the ashram and they caught the thief. They kept him in one room and waited for the morning. In the morning they took the thief to Gandhiji. The thief was shivering with fear. Gandhiji looked at the thief and asked, “Did you have breakfast?” Gandhiji then looked at the manager of the ashram and said, “Why, is he not a human being? First feed him. Will talk of punishment later.” The thief was touched by the kindness and changed his behavior to correct himself.”⁴⁸

This story illustrates the power of the Hindu value of forgiveness (kshamaa).

Story: Mahatma Gandhi sleeps peacefully before a Press Conference

Before 1947, India was ruled by the British government. Once, Mahatma Gandhi visited London to negotiate India’s independence. He was to have a press conference the following day. As usual, it was expected that the newspersons would try to corner him with their trick questions, and embarrass him.



The newspersons reached the place where he was residing the previous night. They were surprised to find that Mahatma Gandhi was sleeping peacefully.

One of the newspersons asked his secretary, “Is Gandhi not tense or stressed about the press conference tomorrow? Any normal person would not be able to even sleep the previous night.”

The secretary replied, “Mahatma Gandhi is not afraid of your questions and is not worried about preparing for the answers. His mind is very clear, and he does not say one thing and mean another. When you ask him any

question, he will answer exactly what is in his mind. So why should he get worried and lose his sleep?”

⁴⁸ *Hindu Culture*. Grade 9 Bala Vihar Teachers’ Handbook. 2011. Chinmaya Mission West. Piercy (California), lesson 24

A day before he was about to see King George VI, the British Emperor, a reporter commented about Gandhi's simple clothing, "You will be seeing the King. Don't you think you should be wearing something more substantial and decent?" Mahatma Gandhi smiled and replied, "I think the King is wearing enough clothes for both of us!"

Another reporter asked him, "What do you think of Western Civilization?" Mahatma Gandhi replied, "I think it is a good idea!" [What he meant to say was that some westerners consider themselves as more civilized than other human beings, forgetting that the worst acts of savagery and barbarianism in human history have often been conducted by the western countries. In those times, most Indians did not have the courage to show the mirror to their colonial masters.]

These incidents demonstrate his practice of the Hindu values of straightforwardness (*aarjavam*), simple living and non-materialism (*aparigraha*), as well as truth (*satya*).

Why did Mahatma Gandhi wear Shoddy Clothing?

Once Mahatma Gandhi went on a tour of a village in India. He reached a hut in which lived a family comprising of several individuals. Surprisingly, the individuals would come out only one at a time to see him. When the first individual went back in, the second came out. When the second went back in, the third came out. Mahatma Gandhi was surprised at this behavior of the family and asked the other villagers as to why they did not come all out at once to greet him. A villager replied, "Mahatma-ji, they are a very poor family. They have only one piece of cloth to cover their upper half of the body. Therefore, they are forced to share this piece of cloth, and come out only one person at a time so that they are fully covered in front of you."



Mahatma Gandhi was very hurt to hear this. He thought that if his own countrymen were that poor, he had no right to wear multiple clothes on his own body. From that day onwards, he decided that he will wear only one cloth on his body. And from that day, the rich lawyer Gandhi who was fond of wearing expensive clothing now wore only a loin cloth to cover himself, wherever he went.

Story: Practice what you Preach

Once a lady came to Mahatma Gandhi with her young son and complained to Mahatma that her son was guilty of the bad habit of eating jaggery many times every day and requested Gandhi to advise him to give up the bad habit since it was bad for health. Gandhi asked the lady to come after 15 days with the boy.

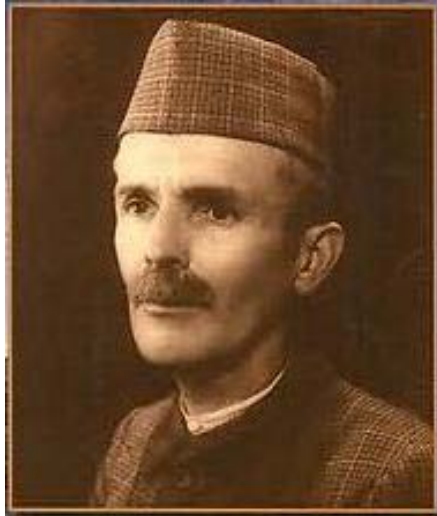
She returned after 15 days. Now Gandhi took the boy to a corner and pointed out how eating of too much of jaggery would produce heat in his body and why he has to leave that bad habit. After two months, that lady came back to Gandhi to thank him since her son had given up that habit on Gandhi's advice.

However, the lady was curious to know why he asked her to come after 15 days. When she asked, Gandhi replied, "Oh my child, when you first came to me, I was not in a position to advise your son to give up eating jaggery because I myself ate too much of it. In order to advise him, I had to first overcome my own bad habit. Therefore I took 15 days' time during which I got rid of my own habit, and only then did I become qualified to advise your son. How can a man preach something when he is not already following that?"



21.3 Satyānand Stokes – The Christian Missionary who became a Hindu

Today, the state of Himachal Pradesh in India is famous for its apples and other fruit. Few people know however that the scientific cultivation of fruit was introduced into the region by an American named Samuel Evans Stokes, who was born in Philadelphia (USA) in 1882 in a wealthy family. In 1905, a devastating earthquake hit the region. Soon thereafter, Samuel arrived in the hope of helping the people who had suffered and also converting them to Christianity.



When Samuel reached the area, he thought, “Let me study the Hindu religion that these people follow, so that I can tell them about Jesus in a way that they can understand.” But after he started studying about Hinduism, he realized that all the truths of Christianity were already present in the Hindu scriptures. Therefore, there was no need to teach the Bible to these people.

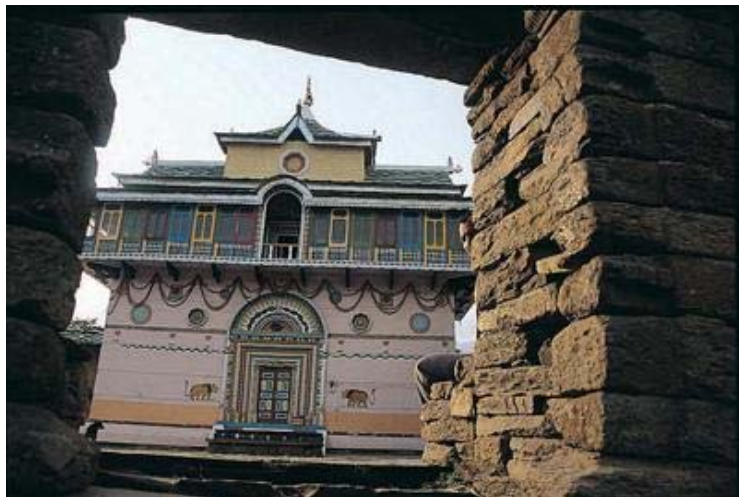
Churches in the western countries like the United States often sent Christian missionaries to convert the Hindus in India saying that the Hindus followed a false religion and were of a low character. Therefore, the missionaries believed that they were doing a great favor to the Hindus by teaching them about Jesus and the Bible. But Samuel realized that what he had been told about the Hindus was completely false. The Hindus he came across were very poor, but they were very good people. Also, their Sadhus lived a very simple life, with very little clothing, food or other possessions. On the other hand, the Christian priests ate three rich meals every day, and

wore well-maintained and expensive clothing.

Samuel therefore concluded that there was no need to convert Hindus to Christianity. He decided to settle down in that area and help the local Hindus come out of their poverty. He married a local Hindu woman, learned the Hindi language, and gave up his American diet. Instead, he now ate only Indian vegetarian food.

Samuel thought that the climate of the area was ideal for growing different varieties of fruit, of which there was a shortage in India. He took samples of soils from many areas of the region and sent them to a laboratory for analysis. After getting the test results, he used his research on agriculture to plant right fruit plant in each area. Within a few years, the locals were able to reap harvests of fruit and sell them to earn money.

In those days, Himachal Pradesh was ruled by many different Hindu kings who often exploited poor people and made them do work for no pay. Samuel supported these poor people and participated in a protest against this practice of making the poor work without pay. A local king arrested him for a short time. But thanks to Samuel’s efforts, the rich of that area started paying the poor decent wages for their work. Samuel also joined the Indian freedom struggle. He wanted the British rulers to leave India. The government therefore jailed him for a year in 1921. Later, he also helped the Hindus in Hyderabad in southern India to protest against the Nizam (the ruler of that kingdom) because he was harassing the Hindus and forcibly converting them.



Gradually, Samuel became more and more attracted towards Hindu Dharma. He wrote that the teachings of Hindu scriptures had cleared his doubts about Bhagavān when even the Bible could not answer his questions. By 1926, he even started questioning whether Jesus was really unique (as the Church claimed). He was also very troubled by the Christian view that sinners are sent permanently to a hell where they are tortured. He said that Bhagavān could not be so cruel as to torture anyone permanently. Finally, he approached Pandit Rishiram, a follower of Swami Dayanand

Saraswati, and requested that he be converted to Hindu Dharma. After becoming a Hindu, Samuel Evans Stokes took the Hindu name Satyānand Stokes. Close to his home, he also got constructed a beautiful Mandir whose walls have the verses of the Gita and the Upanishads written on them.

Satyānand Stokes passed away in 1946, but his descendants still live in India, and follow the Hindu Dharma. They continue to work for the welfare of Indians and Hindus, just as Satyānand had done most of his life.

21.4 Pandit Shivdas Sadhu constructs a Temple in the Ocean

More than 150 years ago, the British started taking people from India to work on sugar plantations on the island of Trinidad in the Atlantic Ocean. Most Indians were Hindus, but the British did not allow them to practice their Hindu Dharma.



One Hindu man named Shivadas Sadhu built a small Mandir of Shiva on a farm. But the government broke it, saying, "The land does not belong to you." Shivadas said, "The land might be yours, but the sea belongs to no one!" So every day after work, Shivdas started carrying stones and rocks in a leather bag on his bicycle. He started putting them on the coast of the sea, and slowly built a long path in the ocean. At the end of the path, he then constructed a small island. After 25 years of hard work, he finally constructed a Hindu Mandir on that island.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago recognized his dedication to Hindu Dharma, and declared the Mandir as a

national monument. This means, that Trinidad recognizes the Mandir built by Shivadas as an important part of the culture of that country! Let us learn from Shivdas, and build Mandirs to Bhagavān and practice our Dharma wherever we go, even if the local government puts hurdles in our ways.

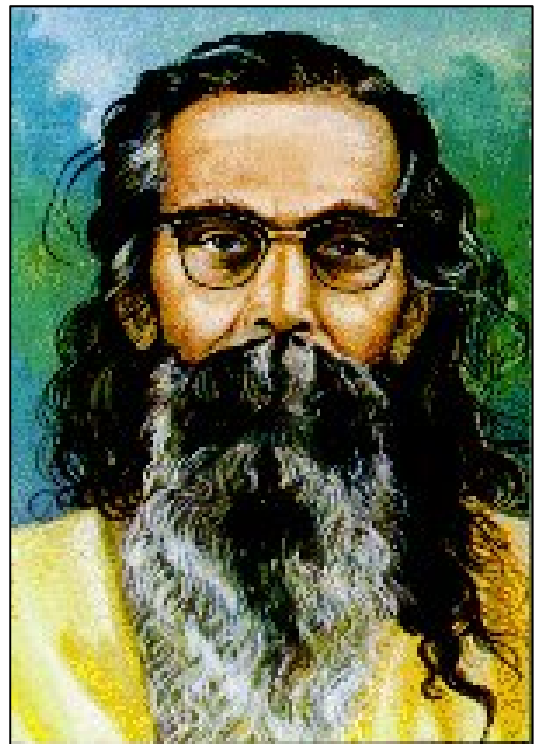
21.5 Guru Golwalkar

Guru Golwalkar was the second chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which is a social organization of the Hindu community, and the largest volunteer organization of the world. The following two instances from his life give a glimpse of his beliefs and practices.

Story: Even Kings must obey Rules: One way to promote equality in the society is to make sure that everyone follows the same set of rules, and that no one is above the law. We must object when the so called powerful, rich and famous try to break rules, and expect preferential treatments.

In the year 1929, the Nizam (The ruler of the kingdom of Hyderabad) visited the aquarium in the Indian city of Madras (now called Chennai). The Nizam was then a powerful Indian ruler, and one of the richest men in the world. The manager of the aquarium thought that it would be inappropriate to ask the Nizam to buy the entrance ticket.

But Madhavrao Golwalkar, who also worked there, insisted that no exceptions must be made – even the Nizam must obey the



rules. Golwalkar also ensured that the Nizam entered the aquarium only after he had produced the ticket at the entrance, like any other visitor. All the officials of the aquarium were stunned because the Nizam was a powerful man. They heaved a sigh of relief only after the Nizam had left after an uneventful trip. Through his example, Guru Golwalkar (as he was later called) demonstrated that no one is above the law, and that rules apply to everyone.

Story: Guru Golwalkar teaches the value of Fortitude to his followers: “In response to a call given by Guru Golwalkar in 1942 (during the Quit India movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi), thousands of youth all over India vowed to dedicate themselves entirely for the work of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, a Hindu voluntary organization) on a whole-time basis. Thus, the branches of RSS sprouted even in remote corners of the country.

During tours, Guru Golwalkar was very particular about keeping to the time-schedules, totally unmindful of vagaries of weather, floods, winds, heat or cold. Nothing came in the way of his predetermined program.....Once, rains began to pour right at the time of the Prayer. The RSS workers in attendance were naturally upset. One of them rushed and opened an umbrella and tried to hold it over Guruji. Without disturbing his posture of prayer, Guruji closed the umbrella with his left hand and completed the prayer in the torrential rain. While talking to the volunteers soon thereafter he said, “If we are scared of even inclement weather, how can we achieve our goal? Those ready to do anything for the cause of the country should pay least heed to the needs of their body. How could we become eligible for worship of the nation unless we overcome the nature?”⁴⁹

21.6 Pandit Shanker Dev Pant



Pandit Shanker Dev Pant is a national hero of Nepal. After he completed his MA abroad, which was considered a formidable achievement in the early 20th cent., the King of Nepal offered him very lucrative job offers.

But Pandit Shanker Dev noticed that his country was very backward in matters of education. The overall rate of literacy was very low. Therefore, he decided to reject all job offers from the Govt. of Nepal and instead focus on education of the masses.

With the help of like-minded people, he worked hard day and night to found numerous schools for children and vocational centers for

training the Nepalese youth. He managed his personal finances somehow, with great difficulty, but never let his poverty dampen his spirits. His efforts promoted education in Nepal in a great way. The Nepalese government has honored his legacy by naming a university campus in Kathmandu, the capital city, after him.

21.7 Swami Ghanananda: Taking Hindu Dharma to Ghana (Africa)

Swami Ghanananda, was born to Christian parents in Ghana, a country in western Africa. As a child, he tried to understand the mysteries of the universe through the Bible, but he was not satisfied. He happened to read some books on Hindu Dharma, and decided to learn more about it.

He travelled to Rishikesh, a holy Hindu city in India, where he met his Guru. He became a sannyasin and took the name Swami Ghanananda Saraswati. His Guru advised him to move back to Accra, the capital of Ghana, and start an ashram there.



⁴⁹ Puttige, pp. 27-29



well as in the neighboring country of Togo in Africa.

Initially, he faced some opposition from the local people. But soon, more and more people started visiting him to listen to his talks. Through donations, he has started a temple cum ashram in 1975. It is said that as a result of his efforts, 2,000 local residents of Ghana have become followers of Hindu Dharma, and attend worship at these temples regularly. The mandir today celebrates all major Hindu festivals and African Hindus can be frequently seen singing bhajans in Hindi and other languages.

Swamiji passed away in 2016, but thanks to his efforts, Hindu Dharma is now the fastest growing religion in Ghana as

22. Some Modern Hindu Saints

22.1 Swami Bankhandi Maharaj (1763 – 1863 CE)



Originally from Nepal, Swami Bankhandi became a follower of the Udāsī community of Sadhus at a place called Kurukshetra in northern India. This community of Sadhus was founded by Shrichand, the eldest son of Guru Nanak. The Udāsīs travelled all over India, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan to spread the message of Hindu Dharma and the Sikh Gurus.

When Bankhandi Maharaj arrived in the Sindh region (today in Pakistan) in 1823, the area had been under the Muslim rule for 1100 years. Hardly any old Hindu temple had survived. There were practically no scholars who had studied the important Hindu scriptures. Hindus were not allowed to celebrate their festivals, own land, ride horses or even wear good clothing. They were frequently harassed by the rulers, and did not have the courage to worship mūrtis. Instead, most Hindus had started worshipping Muslim holy men at their graves. Swami Bankhandi decided that he will spend the rest of his life teaching true Hindu Dharma to the Hindus of Sindh, who still formed 20% of the population of the region.

In the Indus river which flowed in that area, there were several islands on which no one lived. Bankhandi chose a small island close to the city of Sukkur. This island was covered with plants and thorny bushes. Gradually, Bankhandi cleared the island, and started installing one mūrti after another. He lived there for 40 years, meditating, worshipping, and working hard to create small Mandirs over these mūrtis.



After a few years, the Hindus of that area gathered courage and started coming to the island to have a darshana of Swami Bankhandi, and also worship the mūrtis. After Swami Bankhandi passed away, his students approached rich Hindus of the area.

With the donations received, they gradually constructed beautiful Mandirs, rest houses and other structures for Hindu visitors one after the other. The result was that soon, Hindus started coming to the island in thousands, especially on festival days. The efforts of Swami Bankhandi, and his meditation and courage created a new holy place of worship for the Hindus, who had been prevented from practicing our Dharma freely for over 1000 years.

In 1947, Sindh became a part of Pakistan and most Hindus fled to India. But even today, there are 2.5 million Hindus in Sindh. On festival days, more than 20,000 Hindus come to celebrate, taking boats from the banks of the Indus river. Many Hindus from India too go to worship at the Mandirs on the island, and offer their respect to Swami Bankhandi Maharaj, who had spent many years of his life to create a center of worship for the Hindus of Sindh.

Did You Know?

Nepal is a beautiful country containing some the highest mountains in the whole world. It has contributed a lot to the

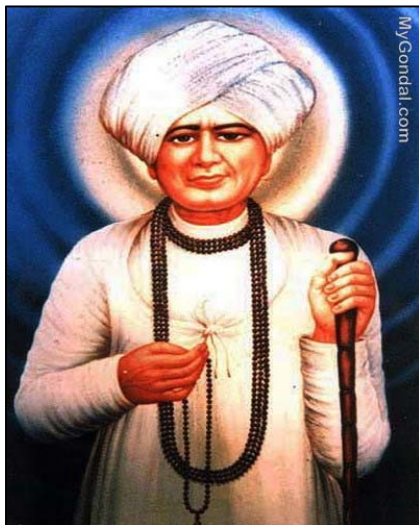


growth of Hindu Dharma. Devī Sītā was a Nepalese Princess. Her father Sīrdhvaja Janaka ruled the kingdom of Videha, whose capital Mithilā was located in Nepal. Today, this city is called Janakpur. There is a beautiful Mandir to Devī Sītā called 'Jānakī Bhawan' located in Janakpur. See its picture to the left.

Bhagavān Buddha too was born in Nepal at a place called Lumbini. In the 18th

century, the Nepalese ruled large portions of the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand in northern India. At that time, the Nepalese soldiers constructed many famous temples in northern India. For example, the Gangotri Mandir at the source of River Ganga was constructed by a Nepalese army commander.

22.2 Jalarām Bapā and Vīrbāī



Hindu Dharma teaches us that if there is one good deed that we must every day, it is feeding holy men, and the needy. Therefore, giving food in charity is called 'sadāvrata', which means, 'an eternal holy vow.' One must feed not only humans, but if possible, also animals.

One saint who followed the sadāvrata was Jalarām (1799 – 1881) of Rajkot, in the Indian state of Gujarat. He was born in a family of businessmen, but at a very early age, he announced that he had no interest in running his father's business. Instead, with whatever money he had, he liked to feed visiting Sadhus, the poor and the needy. He and his wife became disciples of a Guru named Bhoja Bhagat, who was a low-caste farmer himself.

The Guru asked Jalaram to start the sadāvrata, and gave him a mūrti of

Bhagavān Rama to worship every day. Jalarām was worried that he might not have enough to feed the needy every day. But his Guru said, "Worship Rama every day. Soon, Hanuman will also come to you. And after that, you will never be short of food for giving away in charity." Jalarām and his wife Vīrbāī worked as laborers for reaping the harvest in the farms of others. In return, the farm owners gave the couple money and a share of grain, with which they practiced the sadāvrata.



The Guru's words came true. In a few days, a mūrti of Hanuman appeared out of earth mysteriously, and Jalarām started worshipping him along with the mūrti of Rama. And just as his Guru had said, Jalarām noticed that he always had enough food to distribute from his own earnings. His friends and admirers also started offering food to Jalarām so that he could distribute it every day. Jalarām helped in grinding of corn and preparing food with hard physical labor. The fame of Jalarām and his wife began to spread far and wide for their noble and generous behavior. People started saying that Jalarām could even work miracles. For instance, once a tailor named had an excruciating



stomach ache that the doctors were unable to cure. He fell at the feet of Jalarām and called him Bapa ('father') begging him to pray on his behalf. Jalarām prayed to Rama and the tailor's stomach ache got cured! Thereafter, he came to be called Jalarām Bapa by his admirers. . In another instance, a thief came to Jalarām and begged him to protect him from imprisonment. The criminal was not only released from his punishment, but with Jalarām's guidance, he became a good man himself for the rest of his life.

At another time, a rich Muslim merchant was cured of his illness by Jalarām Bapa, who prayed at the merchant's home and asked Bhagavān Rama to cure him. All doctors had told the merchant that his illness was incurable and that he would die. But soon after Jalarām prayed for him, the merchant became well. Out of gratitude, he donated a cartload of food grains to Jalarām's kitchen.



Once, three Arabs who worked for a Hindu employer quit their job when their master refused to increase their pay. On their way to look some other work, they killed some birds for food, and put them in a bag. As they crossed the home of Jalarām, he invited them to come inside and eat some food. The Arabs were embarrassed, because they were carrying the dead birds in the bag, whereas Jalarām was a vegetarian. They hung the bag on a tree outside and went in to eat Jalarām's food. After the meal was done, the saint came out to see them off, and saw the bag hanging from the tree. He touched the bag with his stick and said, "The birds inside the bag must be feeling suffocated. Open the bag and release them." In his own lifetime, people of many religions (and not just Hindus) started

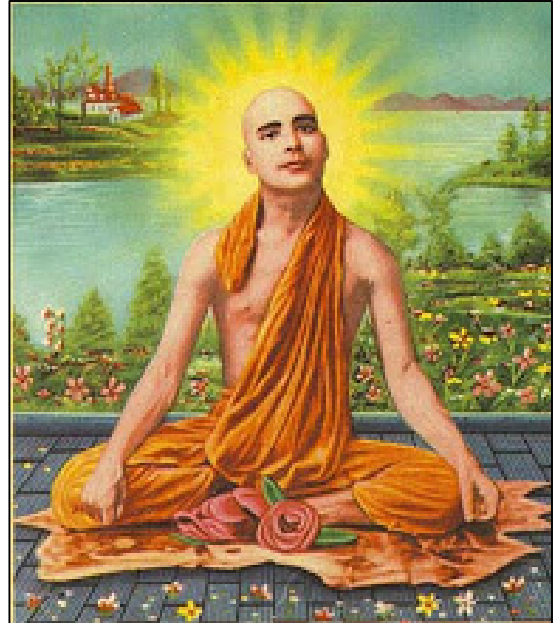
regarding him as a great saint. When the Arabs opened the bag, they were shocked to see that the birds were alive. They let the birds fly off. Jalarām then blessed the Arabs and said, "Go back to your employer, and he will raise your salary more than you had asked for." The Arabs did as they were told, and were surprised that the employer raised their salaries by seven rupees, although they had asked for only rupees four more.

Even today, his descendants continue Virbāṭ' and Jalarām Bapa's sadāvrata. He is regarded as a saint by a large number of Hindus, who have constructed temples in his honor not only in India, but also in the countries of East Africa, the United States of America, New Zealand and in the United Kingdom.

22.3 Swami Rāmatīrtha (1873 – 1906 CE)

Swami Rāmatīrtha was born in the village of Murariwala in the district of Gujranwala (in Pakistan). From a very young age, he was very interested in reading and listening to Hindu holy books. As a young man, he became a mathematics teacher at a college in Lahore (in Pakistan). One day, he heard a speech of Swami Vivekananda and was so impressed that he decided to become a Sannyāsī himself.

Swami Rāmatīrtha travelled all over the world extensively. One day, he was sitting in a train in Japan. In those days, he mainly ate fruit, but was not able to procure good fruit. He happened to make a comment. "It appears that Japan does not have good fruit," which was overheard by a Japanese man present nearby. To Swamiji's surprise, the man immediately ran away from him, and then returned with a basket of excellent quality fruit. Offering them to Swamiji, the Japanese man said, "Sir, please accept these choicest fruit as a gift from me. But please promise to me that when you return to India, you will not say to anyone that Japan does not have good fruit." Swamiji was very impressed by the love that the Japanese man had for his motherland.



During his travels in the United States in 1902-1904, numerous Americans came to hear Swami Ramatirth's discourses on Vedanta, or the teachings of Upanishads. One day, a lady came to see the Swami, and wept in front of him. She said, "Ever since I have lost my only child, my son, my life has been full of darkness. I do not see any more hope in my life. I am seeking true peace and happiness. Can you help me find it?"

The Swami responded, "To get something as precious as peace and happiness, you will need to pay a price. If you agree to do so, I will come to your home tomorrow and show you how to obtain it." The lady agreed.

The following morning, Swami Ramatirth knocked the door of the lady's home. When she opened, she saw that the Swami had come with an African American child. The Swami said to her, "If you raise this child as your own son, and educate him and love him, you will get true peace and happiness."



In those days, blacks and whites, it was very rare to see whites accept blacks as family members. The lady cringed and said, "Sir, how can a white woman accept a black child as her son?"

The Swami said, "If you cannot accept this child as your own, then you will find it very difficult to get true happiness and peace. There is unhappiness in this world because we discriminate against and look down upon others. Only when we accept and respect everyone whether they are black or white, will we get true peace."

Once Swami Ramatirth arrived at Rishikesh, on the banks of Ganga, in one of his pilgrimages. There, he met a practitioner of Yoga who was renowned for his Yogic powers. Eager to meet him, the Swami rushed to his Ashrama and asked him, "Lord! I am in search of a true teacher of Yoga. You have been practicing Yoga for more than 30 years. Please enlighten me as to what is the fruit of practicing Yoga."

The Yogi replied, “As a result of my Yogic practice, I have learned how to walk on water.” Swamiji was astounded when the Yogi actually walked on the water of Ganga in front of his own eyes. Swamiji then asked, “What else can we acquire from Yoga?” The Yogi replied, “You must be a fool. Being able to walk on water is not a common feat. I have struggled for 30 years to acquire this miraculous power. What else could I want?”

Swamiji said, “But what is the use of this power to be able to walk on water? I could give a Rupee to a boatman to cross the river. I was looking for a Yogi to teach me the spiritual gifts of practicing yoga. I do not think that being able to walk on water is going to take me any closer to Paramatman.”

22.4 The Avatāra of Devī Annapūrṇā -Dokka Sitamma (1841-1909 CE)

The holy city of Varanasi is said to be blessed by Annapurna Devi, a manifestation of Devi Parvati who gives food to humanity. It is believed by the Hindus that due to Her blessing, no one will ever go hungry in Varanasi. In the temple of Annapurna Devi in that city, there is also a picture of Dokka Sitamma, a philanthropic widow who lived barely 100 years ago.

Dokka Sitamma was widowed at a young age, even before she and her husband had any children. She lived all alone in her hut, located in a fertile district in the coastal area of the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. She had inherited several acres of fertile land on which were grown crops of various kinds.

Every day, she would cook a lot of food and send out a call for whosoever wanted to join her for food. She was sensitive enough to understand that the poor and hungry people are sometimes too embarrassed to beg for food. But when she invited all to her door, they felt welcomed to arrive and leave after filling their stomachs. She served food to everyone who was hungry, without regard to whether they were rich or poor, of high or of a low social status, man or woman. This went on for several decades. Meanwhile, her greedy neighbors and relatives gradually robbed her of the land that she owned. Her wealth went on decreasing day by day. But still, she lovingly continued to call people over for food every day.

So lovingly she fed everyone that those who benefited from her generosity started narrating miraculous stories about her. Someone reported that a person who ate from her hands was cured of some disease. Another person said that he bore enmity towards his family member, but after eating her food, the feelings of enmity and hatred disappeared from his mind. Sitamma continued to feed the poor till she became very old, and very poor. She decided that she would now use her remaining money to travel to Varanasi, more than 1000 miles away, for pilgrimage. She also hoped to die in that city, a dream for all pious Hindus.

She hired a cart with a driver and bullocks and set out for Varanasi. A few miles from her home however, when the cart stopped for the night, she heard a family comprising of a couple and their hungry children at the rest-

house. The man was saying to his children, “I know you have not eaten today. But I have no money. Let us wait till tomorrow. We will reach Sitamma’s home and she will surely have some food to share.” The children were really hungry and started crying.

Sitamma immediately woke up the driver and commanded him to rush the cart back to her house. The driver protested, but to no avail! The following day, the family arrived, and Sitamma had food ready for them. She had abandoned her trip to Varanasi, realizing that there were people who needed her. But there was something greater that she had sacrificed – her self-respect. She had used up all her money for the trip and had nothing left to buy food. To save the hungry family of the embarrassment of begging, she had gone to her neighbor’s home and begged for some food for them!

When Sitamma passed away in her hut, it is said that a bolt of lightning arose through the roof of her hut, and disappeared in the skies. In the Hindu tradition, this is treated as a sign that the person who had died was a great soul. Sitamma surely was one, and a jewel of the Hindu



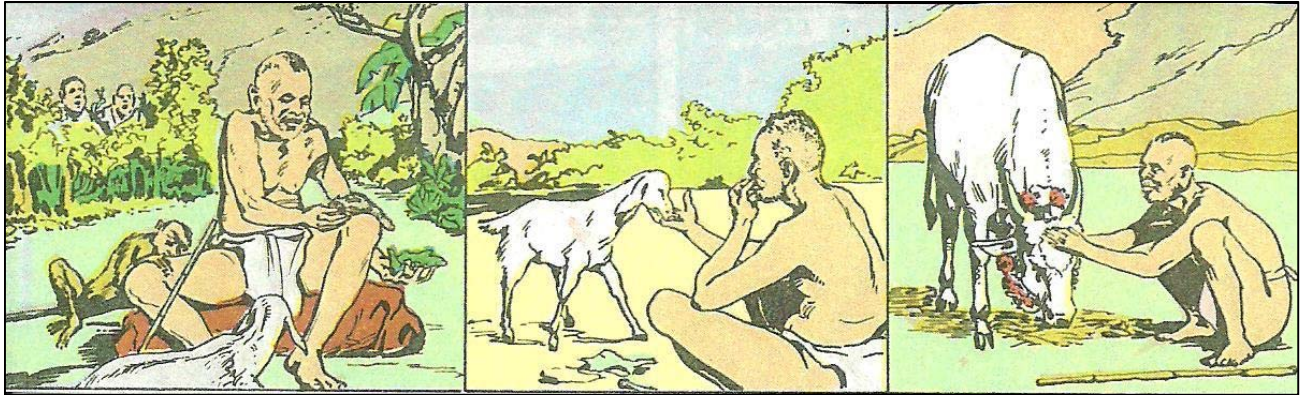
society. Today, she is considered an Avatāra of Devi Annapūrṇā and her picture is worshipped in Her shrine in Varanasi.

22.5 Ramana Maharshi (1870 – 1950 CE)

Shri Ramana Maharshi is considered as one of the greatest Hindu saints of modern times. His followers lovingly refer to him as 'Bhagavān.' Unlike many other saints, he did not write many books, or even give many sermons (religious talks) for his followers. Instead he taught that we should look within ourselves and find that ātman, because that is what we truly are – the Ātman. When he passed away in 1950, a fiery meteor shot through the sky. In the Hindu tradition, it is said that this happens when a great saint leaves his body to become one with Bhagavān. Numerous stories are narrated from his life showing how he taught us the values of Dharma through simple examples.

Story: Ramana Maharshi nurses the damaged eggs of a bird

"One day, Bhagavān Ramana while picking up his towel from a rack disturbed a sparrow's nest. As a result of this, one of the eggs fell on the ground and cracked a little. Ramana was sleepless over this incident. He took that egg with tenderness and nursed the broken egg every day. When the egg fell on the ground, he felt heart broken. He cried out, "Look, what have I done! How sorrow-stricken will be mother sparrow to see its egg broken!" Every day, he used to gaze at this egg and pray for its hatching and for the child of the sparrow coming out of it without any physical handicap. For this purpose, he kept the egg safely inside the towel by wrapping the towel over it. One day when the

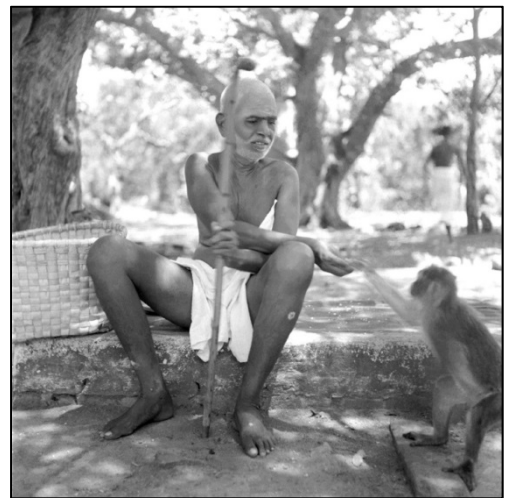


little bird came out of it, he was happy. He caressed it and passed it on to others!"⁵⁰

The Yogic scriptures claim that in the presence of a great Yogi, even violent creatures become peaceful. The animals of Bhagavān Ramana's Ashrama in Tiruvannamalai were extremely friendly with the saint. Bhagavān Ramana was often seen feeding a monkey, squirrel, cow, goat etc., food with his own hands. The animals trusted him and ate from his hands. They even seemed to listen to and follow his requests and commands. When the Maharshi was at his deathbed, his pet white peacock perched itself on the roof of his room, and wailed inconsolably.

Why we should not waste any food: Most of us waste a lot of food. Or even when we eat, we do not think about how much effort goes into producing it. The following story teaches us how the food we eat is truly a blessing of Bhagavān and therefore we should eat it with a lot of love and respect.

"...Ramana Maharshi saw a few grains of rice fallen on the ground near the kitchen. He immediately sat down and started collecting them, one by one. Some of the devotees gathered around the Maharshi to see what he was doing.



⁵⁰ Krishnamani, pp. 510-511

They could not believe that the great sage who had left his home and all for the sake of God cared so much for a few grains of rice. One of them even said, “Bhagavān, we have many bags of rice in the kitchen. Why do you take so much pain to pick up these few grains?”

The sage looked up and said, “You see only these few grains of rice. But try to see what is inside those grains. The hard work of the farmer who ploughed the field and sowed the seeds, the water of the ocean and the heat of the sun, the clouds and the rains, the cool air and the warm sunshine, the soft earth and the life in rice plants – all these have gone into these grains. If you understand this fully, you will see in every grain the hand of god. So do not crush them under your feet. If you do not want to eat them, give them to the birds.”⁵¹

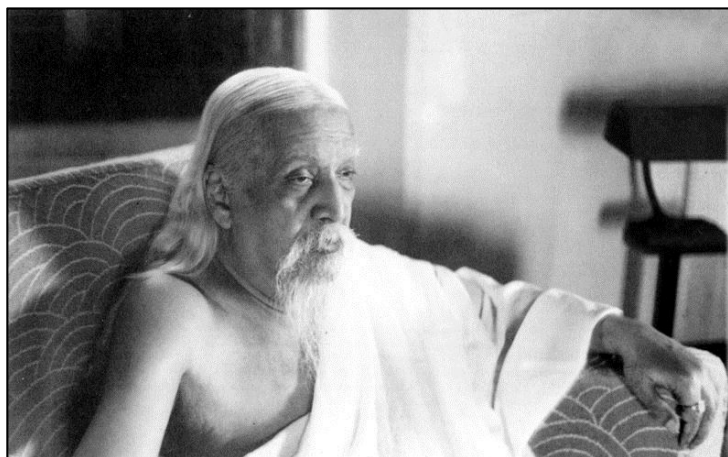
Ramana Maharshi did not waste anything till it was totally worthless. One day, he saw an inmate of his Ashrama throw away rose petals from the previous day’s puja. He said that they should be instead added to the sweet porridge being cooked that day. The cook thought it was strange that rose petals should be added to a sweet dish, but she did as told. The sweet dish actually turned out to be delicious. In the Ashrama, every pin and loose sheets of paper were preserved for future use and nothing was thrown away unnecessarily. The Maharshi wanted to teach everyone to conserve our resources in little ways in this manner.

22.6 Sri Aurobindo

Aurobindo Ghosh was born in 1872 close to the city of Kolkata in West Bengal (India). He had his early education in England and wanted to work in the Indian Civil Service but failed the horse-riding test. As a result, he started teaching history at a college in Baroda in western India. He started writing against the British rule in a newspaper named ‘Indu Prakāsh’. During an agitation against the British rule in 1908, a bomb was hurled at a British judge, killing two British ladies. The police arrested 33 suspects involved, of which Aurobindo was one. While his legal case was being fought, he was kept alone in a prison cell.

During his imprisonment, he started reading the holy scriptures of Hindus like the Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas. He also started meditation. Soon, a great transformation happened to him. He experienced Swami Vivekananda (who had passed away six years earlier in 1902) appear before him to explain him the message of Yoga and Hindu scriptures. Through meditation, Aurobindo was able to experience the ātman that our scriptures tell us about, and also had a vision of Bhagavān Krishna.

Eventually, Aurobindo was released from the jail because the police could not gather sufficient evidence to prove him guilty. Upon his release, Aurobindo moved to Pondicherry on the coast of Tamil Nadu. Unlike the rest of



India, Pondicherry was ruled by the French, and therefore Aurobindo was safe from any British harassment here. He decided to quit all political activities, and devote himself completely to meditation and writing on spiritual matters.

He wrote several books, including *Sāvitrī* (which is regarded as one of the longest poems in English), the *Secret of the Veda*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (explanations of several Mantras in the Vedas) and so on that showed how advanced the teachings of Hindu scriptures were. A French lady named Mira Alfassa Richard, known later as The Mother, arrived in Pondicherry and settled

down and assisted him in his spiritual work.

⁵¹ Pages 12-13 in *Shri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas Guru Hand Book Group I* (for second and third year). Nov 1993. Sri Sathya Sai Balvikas Magazine Sai Darshan: Bombay

A community of disciples settled in Pondicherry and around them an ashram developed where Sri Aurobindo's teachings were taught and discussed. India became free on 15th August 1947, which was also the 75th birthday of Sri Aurobindo. In one of his writings, Sri Aurobindo said that Hindu Dharma was the greatest gift that India had to offer to the world.

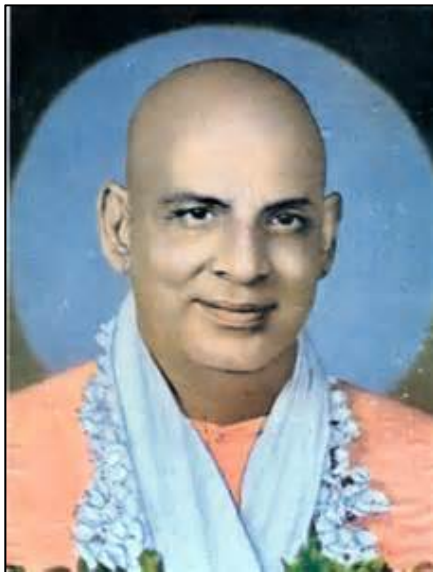
Although Sri Aurobindo passed away in 1958, his work was continued for more two decades by The Mother, and later on by his other students. A lasting effect of his books is that they demonstrated to the Hindus and to others that although our holy books are very ancient, their teachings are very advanced, and are useful to the modern human being as well.

22.7 Swami Sivananda (1887 – 1963 CE)

Swami Sivananda was born as Kuppuswami in 1887 in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu (India). He was a direct descendant of the great Hindu Saint Appaya Dikshitar. Kuppuswami studied medicine and became a medical physician. He moved to Malaysia in 1913 to practice as a doctor. There, he treated the poor free of cost. He also started a magazine named Ambrosia, in which he described simple and inexpensive methods to keep fit and healthy. But after a few years of work in Malaysia, he felt that something was missing in his life. He realized that medicine can only treat diseases of the body, but people suffered also due to diseases of the mind and the ātman. Therefore, he decided to return to India in 1923 and started touring various holy places in search of peace. After a while, he had a life-changing experience that is described below:

“Once, Dr. Kuppuswami had come to India. He had to cross Tamraparni river. He was ferrying through the river in a small boat, with a group of people. They were about to be dragged into a whirlpool and all the inmates of the boat were in the grip of fear of death. One of the passengers – an employee in a jewelry shop, suddenly jumped out and stood upon a projecting granite stone along with a rope tied to the boat. With all his physical power at his command, he pulled the boat towards him! How he did this against the water current and when fourteen people were sitting in the boat was really a miracle. This grim situation which put him face to face with imminent death developed in him full renunciation and with simultaneous unshakeable faith in God and love for him. This incident endangered a colossal change in him and in his attitude to life.”⁵²

Kuppuswami decided to spend the rest of his life as a Sannyāsī. He found his Guru at Rishikesh, the place where the Gangā river leaves the mountains and enters the plains of northern India. His Guru gave him a new name – Swami Sivananda. After becoming a Sannyāsī, he started regular meditation and other Yogic exercises for several hours every day. But he did not give up his practice of medicine. Instead, he spent a lot of time every day treating the poor and homeless for free.



After sometime, he set up an ashram in Rishikesh. A stream of people started visiting him to become his students. He made many of them into Sannyāsīs, including Swami Chinmayananda. Swami Sivananda spent his day doing a lot of hard work – writing, seeing medical patients for free, leading groups of bhajans, and doing tasks like cooking. In his lifetime, he wrote 296 books to spread the message of Hindu Dharma among people of the world in a simple language.

Swami Sivananda was a strong believer in singing bhajans, performing Pūjā and in meditation. He taught that we must not be ashamed of practicing our Dharma. We should sing bhajans, do our Pūjā and read scriptures happily and with the confidence that our Dharma alone can lead us to happiness.

⁵² Krishnamani, pp. 674-675

Another important message that he gave to his followers was that they must never hesitate to do Sevā. Many people think that doing hard work with their hands is insulting, and that it should be left to those who are not educated or intelligent. But Swami Sivananda said that Sevā purifies our hearts and minds, and every one must do it. Sevā means doing physical work (like cooking, cleaning) for the benefit of others without expecting anything like money or even a ‘thank you’ in return. Swami Sivananda said that when we do Sevā, we become humble, and our mind and heart can understand the teachings of the Gita and other scriptures much better.

22.8 Mā Ānandamoyi (1896 – 1982 CE)

Mā Ānandamoyi was born in the Brahmanbaria district of Bangladesh in the year 1896. She was a very beautiful girl and her childhood name was ‘Nirmala Sundari’ which means the pure and beautiful girl. Unlike other children, Nirmala was not much interested in playing or even in studying, but she always seemed happy. Without being taught by anyone, she also started meditating and sitting in different Yogic postures. Her parents became worried and they married her off at the age of 13, thinking that marriage will make her a normal girl.

But, to the disappointment of her husband, she showed no interest in doing her duties as a wife. Instead, she continued to behave as a Yogi. Slowly, with time, her husband realized that Nirmala was not an ordinary woman. In fact, he understood that his wife was a great saint and a Yogi. He became one her first disciples.

After a while, the couple moved to the larger city of Dhaka (which is presently the capital of Bangladesh). A group of devotees started collecting at her residence which was inside a garden, to listen to her bhajans. One day, she suddenly got up and started walking. After a lot of travel she settled down for a while in Dehradun, in northern India. But her travels did not stop, and her devotees continuously followed her wherever she went. She was so lost in meditation that she would even forget to eat and had to be fed by her devotees. But, she loved her devotees a lot. She had special abilities that she had acquired due to her practice of Yoga. As she always seemed to be in a happy mood, she had come to be known as Mā Ānandamoyī.

Story: Mā Ānandamoyī comforts her Devotee in Trouble

One day, during a bhajan session in her ashram, Mā Ānandamoyī suddenly got up and started walking towards the nearest railway station. Her devotees were shocked at her behavior and asked her, “Where are you going?” She said, “To the city of Sarnath.” Then, she hopped into a train that had stopped at the railway station platform. The devotees said, “But this train does not stop at Sarnath.” They hopped in too, nevertheless because they were concerned about their Guru Mā. The train left the station and as it was passing Sarnath, it stopped for some unknown reason even though it was not supposed to stop there. Mā Ānandamoyī got down, and without a word, walked from the Sarnath station towards a hotel without explaining anything at all. She did not check in at the front desk of the hotel, and simply walked towards a particular room, opened its door and entered in. The devotees followed her. In that room, was a lady devotee of Mā Ānandamoyī crying inconsolably. Mā Ānandamoyī hugged her and said, “Do not worry now because I am here to comfort you.”

The devotees were surprised as to what was really happening there. They learned that the woman devotee had arrived in the hotel just a few hours earlier, and got robbed of all her money. She was not poor and did not know what to do. Therefore, she cried out her Guru Mā Ānandamoyī’s name and said, “Mā, please help me.” Apparently, even from that great distance, Mā Ānandamoyī heard her disciple call out to her for help, and got up immediately from the bhajan session to come to her and console her.



Story: Ma Ānandamoyī supports a misbehaving man: In the Ashrama of Ma Ānandamoyī, a young man started misbehaving repeatedly. Everyone else in the Ashram was so disgusted with his behavior that they requested the Ma to expel him. To make a decision in this regard, Ma Ānandamoyī summoned all the inmates of the Ashrama into a meeting with her, and asked them what their opinion was. Everyone, without fail, said that they hated the misbehaving young man, and wanted him to be expelled from the Ashrama.

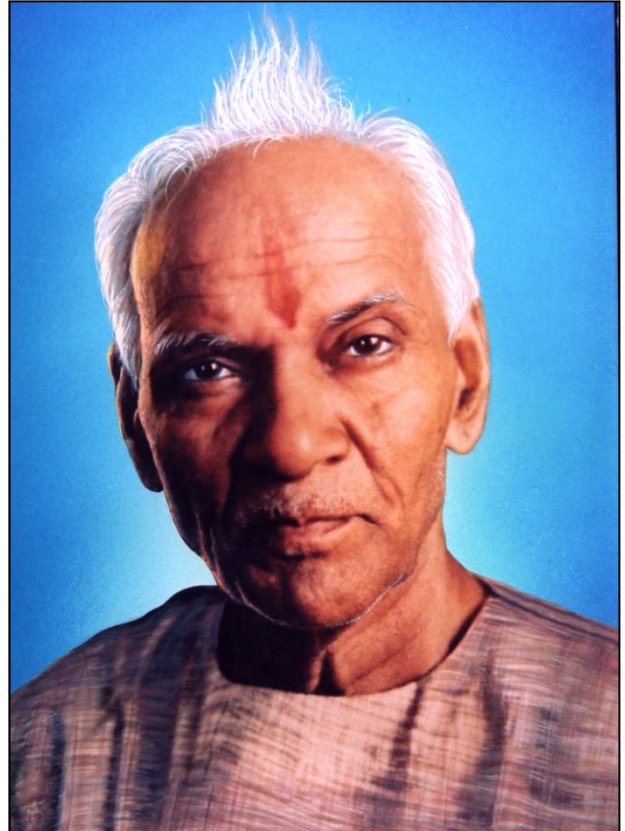
To their utter surprise, Ma Ānandamoyī replied, “Look, when all of you hate him, he has no one to turn to for love and compassion except for me. Other than me, he has no one else to depend on. Therefore, I cannot abandon him. I have decided that he will not be expelled from the Ashrama.”⁵³

22.9 Shri Rām Sharmā Āchārya (1911 – 1990)

Shri Rām Sharmā Āchārya is probably the author of the largest number of books on Hindu Dharma in modern times. In his lifetime, he wrote almost 3000 books and booklets, some of which are several hundred pages long. He translated all the four Vedas, more than 200 Upanishads, the 18 Purāṇas, and dozens of other scriptures into simple Hindi for the common man. Through these books, anyone can easily understand the ancient teachings of our Rishis very easily.

Right from his childhood, he had demonstrated signs of a saintly character. In those days, members of the ‘untouchable’ community were kept at a distance by other Indians. Likewise, lepers were considered contagious and were forced to live away from the society. But even as a young man, Shri Rām Sharmā looked after an ‘untouchable’ woman suffering from leprosy for a very long time even though his family members objected.

Shri Rām Sharmā was a worshipper of Devi Gāyatrī. After he met his Guru at the age of 15, he spent the next 24 years of his life chanting the Gāyatrī Mantra 2.4 million times each year, with the proper religious ceremonies during each cycle of chanting. Through his character and writings, he proved the Hindu belief that chanting the Gāyatrī Mantra with faith and devotion makes one very intelligent and wise. His writings which are several thousand pages long include topics like Karma, Hindu scriptures, culture, history, child psychology, living a healthy life and so on.

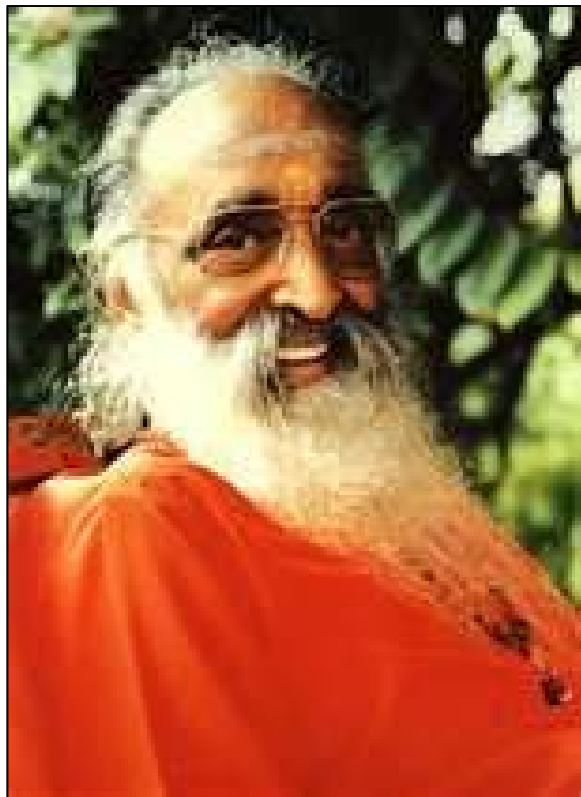


Shri Rām Sharmā believed that we must revive the teachings of the ancient Rishis to create a more just and happy society. In 1953, he organized a grand yajna in which participants chanted the Gāyatrī mantra hundreds of times. He also founded an organization named Gāyatrī Pariwar, and an institute called Shāntikunj in the Hindu holy city of Haridwar to spread the message of Hindu spiritual teachings. Close to Shāntikunj, his followers today run the Dev Sanskriti University to spread his message. After his death in 1990, his wife Mā Bhagavatī Devī continued his work till 1994 and guided the followers of Shri Rām Sharmā Āchārya in performance of several Ashvamedha Yajnas, which is the grandest ceremony in the Vedic scriptures.

⁵³ Krishnamani, p. 7

Looking his books, one wonders how a single person could have such a vast amount of knowledge, and present the same to the common man in a very simple language. Today, his dedicated followers continue to spread the message of the ancient Rishis in a very scientific manner just as Shri Rām Sharmā, their Āchārya (teacher) had done for several decades in his life. Indeed, Shri Rām Sharmā Āchārya is an example of a Rishi who lived in our own times.

22.10 Swami Chinmayānanda (1916 – 1993 CE)



Swami Chinmayānanda was born in Ernakulam in the Indian state of Kerala. As a child, his name was Balakrishna Menon, and he was nicknamed as Balan. He excelled in studies and displayed an excellent memory. As an adult, he became a journalist. When he saw how ignorant and evil minded many Sadhus were, although they pretended to be saintly, he decided to go the town of Rishikesh in the Himalayas and write an article on Swami Sivananda, one of the most famous Sadhus of his times. Balan had hoped that his article would tell the whole world that the so called Swami Sivananda was also a fake, who fooled people into thinking that he was a saint, when in reality he was just an ordinary person like many other Sadhus.

However, after he had stayed in Swami Sivananda's ashram for a few days, his impression of the Swami changed completely. He realized that far from being a fraud, Swami Sivananda worked very hard, writing books, guiding his students, doing manual work and so on. Impressed by the life of Swami Sivananda, Balan himself started learning more and more about the teachings of Hindu scriptures. After a few years, he requested Swami Sivananda to make him a sannyāsi. Balan now had a new name – Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati. Thereafter, Swami Sivananda asked Swami Chinmayananda to go to Swami Tapovan Maharaj to study Hindu scriptures deeply.

When Swami Chinmayananda's education under his Guru Swami Tapovan was complete, he decided to go

across India and conduct public meetings to teach the ordinary people about the message of Hindu scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita. But these holy books were written in Sanskrit which not many understood. Therefore, he decided to conduct his classes in the English language.



Many Hindus were shocked. They said, "Hindu scriptures should be taught only in Sanskrit. Also, those who want to learn the Gita and other scriptures should themselves make an effort to find a Guru in the Himalaya mountains, who could then teach them. It is wrong for a Sadhu to go out to cities and villages to teach them without being asked by others." But Swami Chinmayananda did not agree. He saw that Hindus themselves had so little knowledge of our holy books that he had to teach them to the general public in a language that they could understand, and also

travel to them himself so that people can come and listen to him conveniently.

His lectures started becoming a huge success. Hundreds, if not thousands, attended his talks on the Gita and other Hindu scriptures. A group of his students formed an organization named 'Chinmaya Mission' in the year 1953. The Chinmaya Mission constructed several temples and also opened hundreds of schools to teach Hindu Dharma to children and to adults not only in India, but all over the world. Swami Chinmayananda and his students also wrote and published dozens of books explaining the message of the Hindu scriptures. Thanks to their efforts, millions of Hindus have now become more knowledgeable about own Dharma.

Swami Chinmayananda travelled all over the world to spread the message of Hindu Dharma. During one such trip, he passed away in San Diego in the US in 1993. A very interesting of Swami Chinmayananda's talks was that he used several examples from our everyday lives so that everyone could understand his teachings clearly. The story below gives two examples of how he could teach important lessons to his students in a very humorous way.

Story: The Delusion of a Materialistic Person:

One day, a man came to Swami Chinmayananda and prostrated in front of him to offer his respects. Swamiji immediately got up and prostrated at the man's feet.

The man was aghast. "What are you doing Swamiji? Please get up."

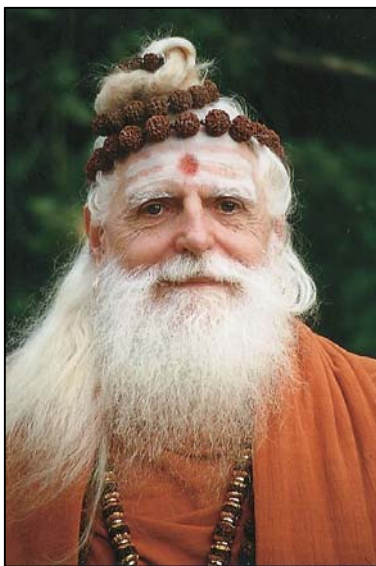
Swami Chinmayananda asked, "If you do not like me bowing to you, then why did you prostrate in front of me?"

The man replied, "I prostrated in front of you because you are a Sannyasi ('a renouncer'), who has renounced the world for the sake of God."

Swamiji replied, "I bowed before you because you are even a greater Sannyasi, as you have renounced God for the sake of the world!"⁵⁴

Once, a man came to Swami Chinmayananda and said, "I have gone through the Gita fifteen times." Swamiji smiled and asked, "But, has the Gita gone through you even once?"

22.11 Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927 – 2001)



Robert Hansen was born in Oakland (California) and spent his early childhood in California and Lake Tahoe (Nevada). He attended the Sunday Church school and asked his teachers several questions that they could not always answer. Therefore, he stopped attending the school. Unfortunately, he was orphaned at a very early age because his mother died when he was 10, and father died when he was 12 years of age. He was adopted by a family friend who ran a dance school close to San Francisco. She specialized in Indian dances and her home and school had a very Indian environment in which the students experienced Indian food, paintings and so on

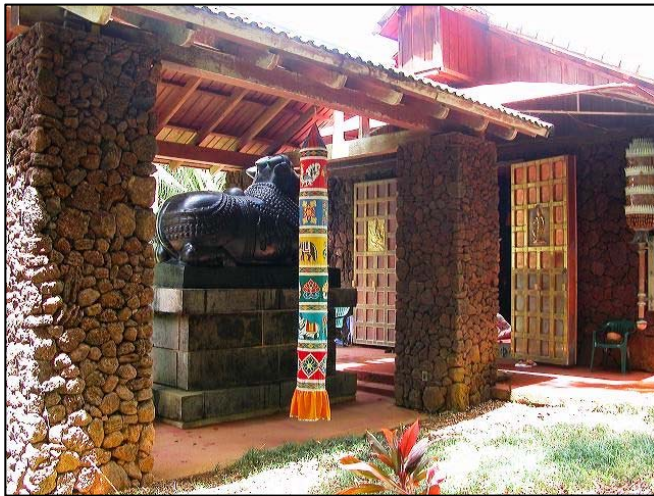
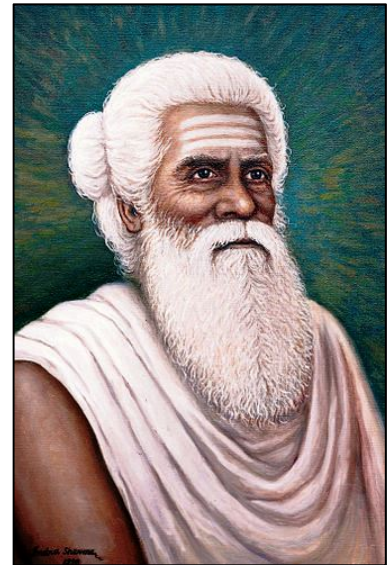
Robert loved music and dance, and he soon became a very famous ballet dancer in San Francisco. But, he was always very attracted to eastern religions. At the young age of 19, he quit his job with a famous dance theater. Instead, he accompanied another dance troupe to reach Sri Lanka. On the island, his dance troupe gave many performances. He also met with many Buddhist monks, Muslim holy men and Hindu Sadhus. Finally, a friend took him to Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, where he experienced Hindu culture first hand.

⁵⁴ Swami Tejomayananda. 2001. *Vision of the Bhagavad Gita*. Central Chinmaya Mission

He visited numerous Hindu temples and met Swami Yogaswāmī (1872 – 1964) who was a very famous living saint. The Guru gave Robert a new name – Subramuniya. Although he met his Guru only three times, Swami Yogaswāmī indicated that he wanted Subramuniya to be the leader of his branch of Hindu Dharma after him. This branch of Hindu Dharma is called the ‘Kailāsha Sampradāya of Nandinātha Paramparā.’ Subramuniya became a Hindu Sannyāsī and returned to the United States when he was barely 22 years old.

Swami Yogaswāmī →

Back in the United States, he spent the next 7 years in meditation following his Guru’s command. Then, in 1957, he founded America’s first Hindu Mandir in San Francisco. Many people who were not dissatisfied with Christianity became his students and learned meditation from him. As Hindu Dharma was not

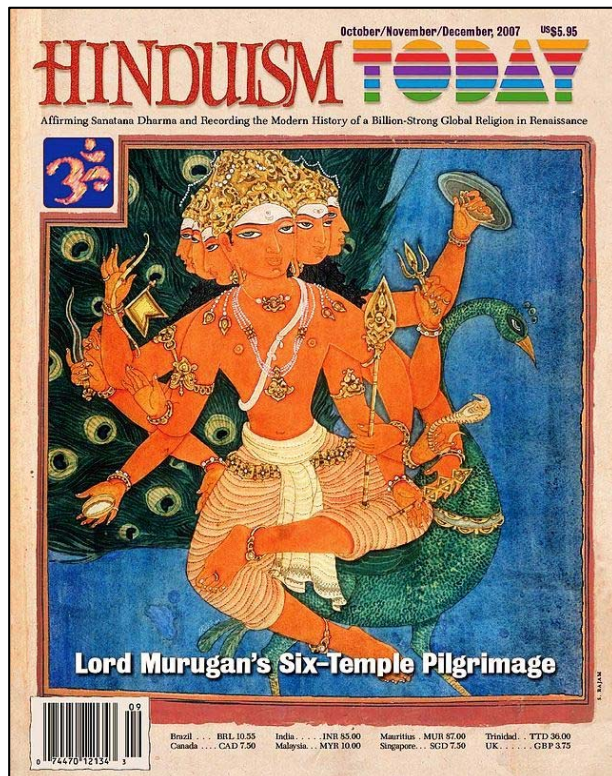


very well known in the area then and Subramuniya did not want to scare his students, he

first named his organization as if it were a Christian Church. But after a few years, he realized that what he taught was really Hindu Dharma, and therefore he insisted that his students give up their Christian practices and live like Hindus.

and constructed the monastery, a beautiful temple named Kadavul Temple, and started growing their own food. He

asked all his students to formally convert to Hindu Dharma. He wrote a booklet called “*How to Become a Hindu*,” which contains guidelines on how non-Hindus can leave their religion and adopt Hindu Dharma.



Subramuniya now headed a Hindu monastery, and also the ancient branch of Hindu Dharma because his Guru Yogaswāmī chose him as his successor to lead several hundred thousand Shaivite Hindus of Sri Lanka. Therefore, he came to be known as ‘Satguru Sivāya Subramuniyāswāmī.’ When he travelled to distant countries like Malaysia and Mauritius, he was welcomed by thousands of people who showered flowers at him and took him in massive processions. During these tours, he noticed that Hindus were being harassed by members of other religions, and were being asked to become Christians and Muslims. Hindu Dharma teaches us to respect all religions, but some Hindus have the wrong belief that all religions are equal. Moreover, our Dharma teaches us to respect teachers and priests of all religions. But, Christian and Muslim priests often abuse our hospitality and start

pressurizing their Hindu hosts to convert. When the Satguru saw this, he taught the Hindus, ***“All religions are not equal. Hindu Dharma is the greatest religion. Being hospitable to Christian and Muslim priests does not mean that we continue to be polite to them even when they abuse our religion. Be proud of our Hindu Dharma and worship Shiva. Never give up Hindu Dharma to convert to any other religion.”***

Satguru and his students saw that most Hindus were ignorant of our own Dharma, and were divided into many groups depending on which country we were from, what language we spoke and which caste we belonged to. Therefore, in 1979, he started publishing a beautiful magazine called Hinduism Today in which the articles covered Hindu Dharma as practiced not only in India but in every country, and within every tradition. He also helped start more than 50 Mandirs in the world. He wrote a 3000 page long course in three massive books that explained the basics of Hindu Dharma to westerners. He represented Hindu Dharma in many conferences and meetings, and received many awards. He founded websites like www.hindu.org and www.himalayanacademy.org. In 2001, he was diagnosed with cancer. He decided to follow the ancient Hindu path of Rishis and refused medical treatment. Instead, he fasted for 32 days and his ātman then merged with Shiva. His work is being continued by his successor Gurudev Bodhinātha Veylanswami and other Hindu sannyāsīs.

Visitors to the island of Kauai in Hawaii are charmed by the beautiful monastery that Satguru Subramuniyaswami had constructed. Money is being collected to complete the construction of a beautiful Shiva temple (Iraivan Temple) nearby. In the ashram, there are several trees that produce the rare rudrāksha beads that the devotees of Shiva like to wear. The Kauai Hindu monastery makes bracelets and necklaces from these beads for Shiva Bhaktas.



← Iraivan Temple

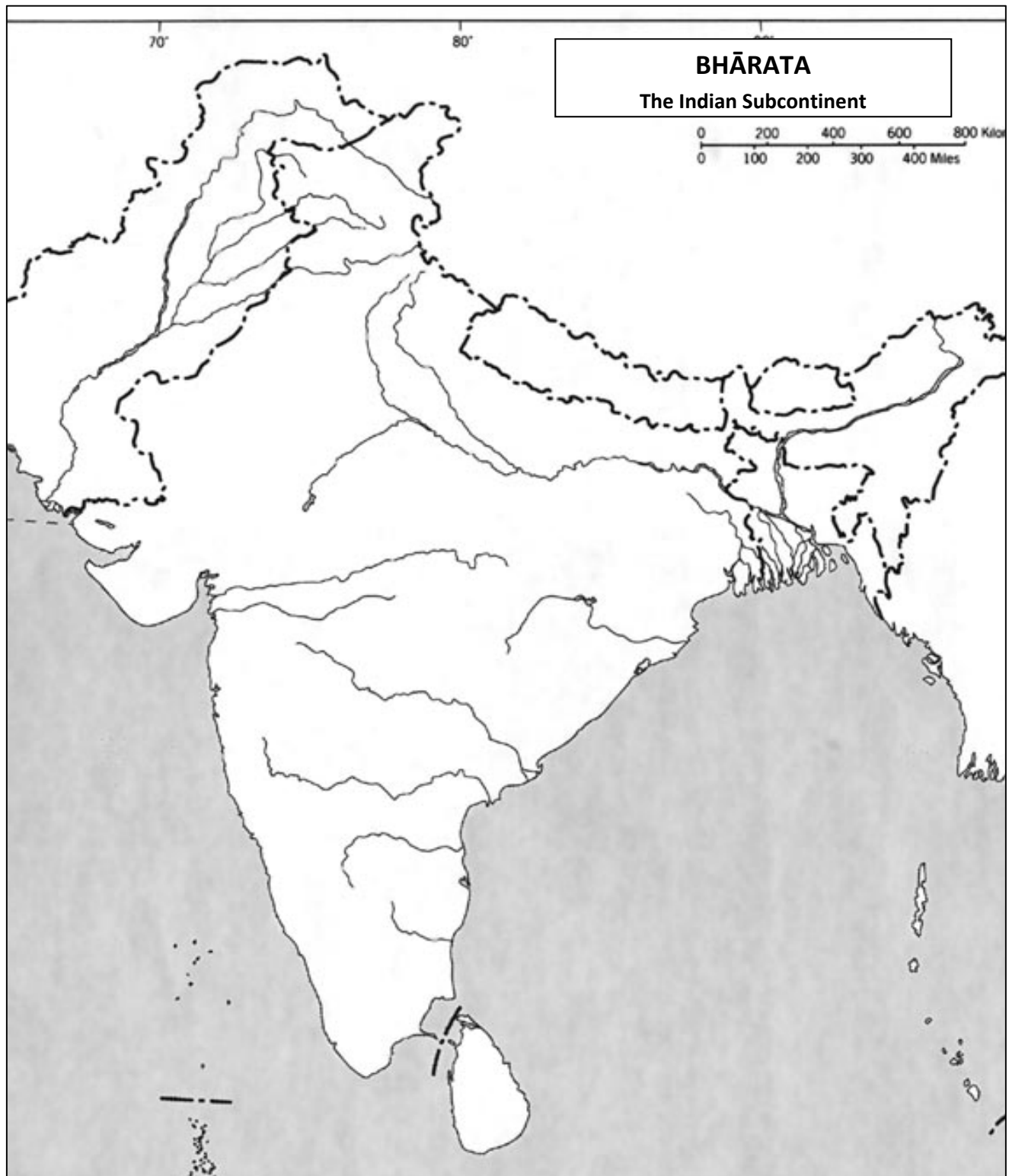


In the United States, Hindu Dharma is described in very insulting and negative ways in textbooks that are used in schools and colleges. The Swamis of the Himalayan Academy are trying to correct this problem by meeting with government officials, pointing out the errors in these books and publishing their own books, magazines and pamphlets that give a correct picture of our Dharma. The Swamis also travel all over the world educating the Hindus about our Dharma. They are very good at technology and have produced beautiful movies and presentations for this purpose. They have printed a series of booklets that are used in Hindu schools all over the world to teach what our Dharma is about to students.

The example of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami shows that one does not have to be from India to be a Hindu Guru because our Dharma is an eternal and a universal religion that comes directly from Bhagavān who has created this entire universe.

From the Satguru and the Swamis after him, we also learn how we Hindus must use modern technology to teach others about our own Dharma in an attractive way. Finally, their publications teach us that all Hindus are one big family no matter which country we have come from. This is because their books and websites have articles, information and pictures related to Hindus not only from India but also in many other countries in all the continents of the world.

Map of the Indian Subcontinent



Map of the World



Timeline: Chronology of Great Hindus

Period	Great Hindus
Before 2500 BCE	
2500-2000 BCE	
2000-1500 BCE	
1500-1000 BCE	
1000-500 BCE	
500-250 BCE	
250 BCE-0 CE	
0-500 CE	
500-750 CE	
750-1000 CE	
1000-1100 CE	
1100 – 1200 CE	
1200-1300 CE	
1300-1400 CE	
1400-1500 CE	
1500-1600 CE	
1600-1700 CE	
1700-1800 CE	
1800-1900 CE	
1900 -	

Select Bibliography

The following is a selective bibliography of works consulted for this book. Many illustrations in the book from taken from these texts.

- Acharya, Shriram Sharma. 2010. *Prajna-Purana* (4 vols). Yug Nirman Yojana Vistaar Trust: Mathura
Amar Chitra Katha volumes (several)
- Albinia, Alice. 2008. *Empires of the Indus*. W W Norton & Company, Inc. New York
- Bajpai, Shiva. 2011. *The History of Hindu India*. Himalayan Academy Publications: USA
- Bhargava, P. L. 1992. *Founders of Indian Civilization*. Asian Humanities Press: Berkeley (California)
- Bhat, K S Haridasa, K B Ramakrishna Rao, A Krishna Rao, T R A Pai. 1977. *Anjali, What the Great Masters have to say on Devotion and Prayer*. Gita Mandir (Manipal)
- Borkakoti, Sanjib. 1995. *Sri Sri Sankardeva, a Total Personality*. Bani Mandir (Guwahati).
- Chaitanya, Devendra and Chakra, Sudarshan Singh. 2013. *Drishtaanta Mahaasaagar*. Randhir Prakashan: Haridwar (in Hindi)
- Chaitanya, Someshwar. *Teachers Manual – Saints of India and the West*. Chinmaya Mission Southern California: Anaheim (California, USA)
- Dave, Ramesh M. 1999. *Sahajananda Charitra*. Swaminarayan Aksharpath: Ahmadabad.
- Dua, Shyam. 2009. *The Lives and Teachings of Great Ten Gurus*. Tiny Tot Publications. Noida (Uttar Pradesh, India)
- Dutta, Swapna. *Tales of Gopal the Jester* (vol I). Unicorn Books Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi
- Glener, Doug and Komaragiri, Sarat. 2002. *Wisdom's Blossoms – Tales of the Saints of India*. Shambhala: Boston
- Goswami, Satswarupa Dasa. 2003. *Prabhupada, Your Ever Well-Wisher*. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: Watford (United Kingdom)
- Jackson, William J. 2007. *Vijayanagara Visions*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi
- Johnsen, Linda. 1994. *Daughters of the Goddess*. Yes International Publishers: St. Paul (Minnesota, USA)
- Joshi, Shadiram. 1976. *Satya ki Manzil, Seva ki Raha*. Sajiv Sahitya Prakashan: Jalandhar (India)
- Kand, Khanderao et al. 2006. *Hindu Culture and Dharmic Traditions*. Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh: USA
- Krishnamani, M N. 1998. *Godly Men and their Golden Words*. Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan: New Delhi
- Kumar, Alok. 2014. *Sciences of the Ancient Hindus*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: Charleston (South Carolina, USA)
- Kumar, Girja. 2013. *The Indus People*. Vitasta Publishing Pvt Ltd.: New Delhi
- Linganna, Simpi. 1975. *Namadeva*. Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust (Bangalore)
- Mahadevan, T M P. 1965. *Ten Saints of India*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan: Bombay
- Malhotra, Geeta. 2009. *Stories of Akbar-Birbal*. Tiny Tot Publications: New Delhi
- Mantha, Sushil et a. *Values in the Bhagavad Gita – Teacher's Manual*. Chinmaya Mission Southern California: Anaheim (California)
- Mathew, Roy J. 2001. *The True Path – Western Science and the Quest for Yoga*. Perseus Publishing: Cambridge (Massachusetts, USA)
- Murti, G V Narayan. 1974. *Narayana Guru*. Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust (Bangalore)
- Muthuraman, M/. 1969. *Glory of Modern India*. Privately Published. Madras (India)
- Nandakumar, Prema. 2013. *Saints of Saivism*. Sri Ramakrishna Math: Chennai
- Pandit Ram Sharma Acharya. 2006. *Pragya Tales for Children*, Part 2. Shri Vedmata Gayatri Trust: Hardwar
- Parekh, Manilal. 1980. *Shri Swaminarayan*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay
- Pathak, Raghunath Prasad. 1973. *Teachings of Swami Dayanand*. Vishveshvaranand Institute: Hoshiarpur (India)
- Poddar, Hanumanprasad and Goswami, Chimmanlal. Samvat 2049. *Bhakta-Charitaank*. Geeta Press: Gorakhpur [In Hindi]
- Poddar, Hanuman Das. *Kalyan, Baalak Vishveshaank*. Geeta Press: Gorakhpur
- Pravrajika Shuddhatmamata. 2003. *The Divine World of the Alvars*. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture: Kolkata
- Pravrajika Suddhatmaprana. 2009. *Indian Saints and Mystics*. Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture: Kolkata

Puttaswamayya, B. 1974. *Hakka-Bukka*. Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust (Bangalore)

Puttige, Rasika. 1996. *M S Golwalkar*. Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust (Bangalore)

Rajee Raman. *For the Love of Krishna and other Stories of Devotees*. Seasons Publishing: Chennai (India)

Ramani, S. 2004. *Great Women of India*, vols. 1-5. Sri Ramakrishna Math: Chennai

Rani, Rakesh. 1983. *Swami Dayanand Saraswati – Jeevan Charitra, Siddhanta, Shraddhanjaliyan* (in Hindi). Dayanand Sansthan: New Delhi

Rao, Korati Srinivasa. 1985. *Vidyaranya*. Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust (Bangalore)

Ray, Irene and Mallika Clare Gupta. 1975. *Tales from Ramakrishna*. Advaita Ashrama: Kolkata

Rosen, Steven. 1988. *The Life and Times of Lord Chaitanya*. Folk Books: Brooklyn (New York).

Sadhu Mukundcharandas. 2006. *Rishis, Mystics and Heroes of India*, Vol. 1. Swaminarayan Aksharpath: Ahmedabad (India)

Shankara, Prabhu. 1980. *Nivedita* (Book No. R-59). Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust: Bangalore

Sharma, Arvind. 1997. *Hinduism for Our Times*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

Shenoy, B Ramabai. 1998. *Shiva Leelamruta*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Mumbai

Shri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas Guru Hand Book Group I (for second and third year). Nov 1993. Sri Sathya Sai Balvikas Magazine Sai Darshan: Bombay

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. 1999. *Weaver's Wisdom*. Himalayan Academy: Kapaa (Hawaii, USA)

Swami Akhandananda Saraswati. 1966. *Narada Bhakti Darshana*. Satsahitya Prakashan (Bombay)

Swami Ishatmananda. 2011. *Tales from Vivekananda*. Advaita Ashrama: Kolkata

Swami Satyamayananda. 2012. *Ancient Sages*. Advaita Ashrama: Kolkata

Swami Sivananda. 2000b. *Sant Charitra* (Hindi translation of 'Lives of Saints'). The Divine Life Society: Shivanandanagar (District Tehri-Garhwal, Uttarkhand, India)

Swami Tejomayananda. 2001. *Vision of the Bhagavad Gita*. Central Chinmaya Mission

Swamis of Kauai's Hindu Monastery. *The Guru Chronicles- The Making of the First American Satguru*. Himalayan Academy: USA

Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita. 1991. *Women Writing in India 600 B.C. to the Present* (Vol. I). The Feminist Press: New York

Trivedi, Krishnaji. 1971. *Mahatmas Saints Sages and Seers of India and Abroad*. Shivaji News Printers: Tiruchi

Upadeshaka, Shivsharma. 2014. *Drishtānta Samucchaya*. Vijaykumar Govindram Hasanand: Delhi

Uncle Sam and Shyam Dua. 2005. *My Little Storyteller, Tenali Raman # 2*. Tiny Tot Publications: Delhi

Venkatesha, Archika. 1975. *Madana Mohana Malaviya*. Rashtrotthana Sahitya Trust (Bangalore)

Vijayam, Ramakrishna et al. 2011. *Stories of the Devotees of Lord Shiva*. Sri Ramakrishna Math. Mylapore (Chennai)

_____. *Pictorial Stories for Children*, vols. 1-25. Sri Ramakrishna Math. Mylapore (Chennai)

Illustration Credits: Illustrations are taken from the above works or from numerous websites that are not being listed here.